

Bound by

VARIOUS LIFESTYLES & CULTURES

Ink

Sara
Fabel

HER BEAUTY IS NO FABLE.
HER WORLDLY EXPERIENCES
AS A MODEL, ARTIST AND
ASPIRING TATTOOIST MAKE
HER EVEN MORE STUNNING.
SARA'S ENVIABLE PORTFOLIO,
AMASSED FROM HER MANY
ACHIEVEMENTS, SPANS CITIES,
STATES AND CONTINENTS.

RICHEL KOTZEN • ENIGMA
KRAZYK • LADY DIAMOND

BIG SLEEPS • SULLEN

EVENTS: MONTERREY • ROMAN

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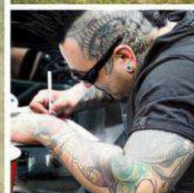
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
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In a day and age where you can find a multitude of excuses to fail, the last thing you need is your own pride becoming one of them. To avoid this, you have to do one thing: Check your ego at the door. Your ego is a powerful tool, which in small doses can be instrumental in boosting confidence or sparking a competitive or creative nerve, but too much of it wages far different results, and by now we all know "that guy" who drank a bit too much of his own juice.

The ego shares the same office with pride, and they both reside in an internal division located at the top floor of your head. Oftentimes, ego leaves many in life focusing on what they are not receiving rather than what they can give. And even though the purpose of the ego is to protect and defend, far too often it's all for the wrong reasons, especially in business and sometimes even in art.

As human beings, one of our most difficult tasks in life is to find that perfect balance between letting our ego serve us and serving our ego. One will get you everything you've dreamed of, and the other will cost you everything you've worked for. Choose wisely, and remember that ego is not the master of its own studio, so don't give it the keys to yours.

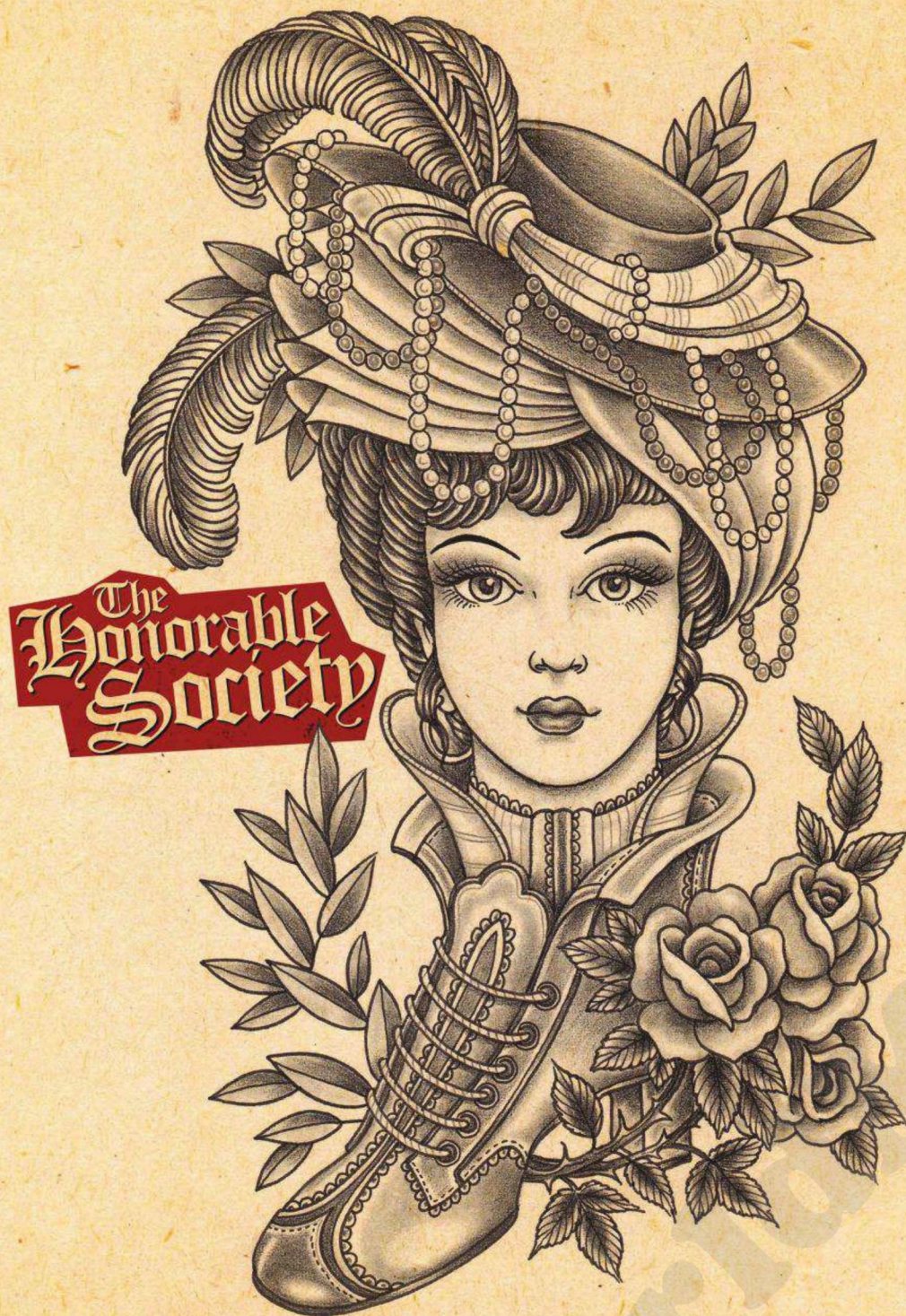
Long story short, don't forget where you came from and remember that success built on shallow roots will soon wither away. 

JOHN JARASA
Editor

John



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8424 B SANTA MONICA BLVD HOLLYWOOD CA
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Editorial

Editor/ John Jarasa
john.jarasa@sorc.com

Associate Editor/ Rich Coyle
rich.coyle@sorc.com

Senior Photographer/ Andy Hartmark

Staff Photographers/ Henry Z. DeKuyper

Managing Editor/ Kristen Prescott

Contributing Writers/ Mike Landers, George Kaplan, Paul Pike

Contributing Photographer/ Beto Mendoza,
N. Mothaggi

Web Producer/ Josh Ching

Art Direction and Design

Creative Directors/ Alan Albanian, Howard C. Lim

Art Director/ Katia Sverdlova

Contributing Graphic Designer, Illustrator/ Nadezda Sverdlova

Archivist/ Thomas Voehringer

Special Thanks.

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Dale Bryson, Ray Rojas

To Subscribe.

order.boundbyink.com

Picture/Modeling Submissions.

boundbyinkmail@gmail.com

Advertising

Publisher/ Rudy Rivas

Associate Publisher/ Omar Rojas - omar.rojas@sorc.com

Sales Assistant/ Jennifer Gonzalez

Advertising Operations Coordinator/ Teri Hancock

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Tampa Office/ 813.675.3500

9036 Brittany Way, Tampa, FL 33619

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OG *Gabriel*
The
COLLECTION



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The new issue is great, guys. It's nice to have something other than the same old rags on the newsstand nowadays!

- JOSHUA GEIST
NICHOLSON

Awesome dual-cover issue! I had to go with the black cover! Kelly Eden's artwork on the bottom of page 30 is just amazing! They look so lifelike! Great work, people. Keep it up!

- GARY HEDGLIN SPIKE

I just want to say that you guys do an amazing job of covering and finding the best artists out there. I was talking with one of my friends and we just discussed with all fluff out there. BBI is a refreshing option to have with great artists and amazing models. Keep up the stellar job, guys, and keep bringing our culture to the mainstream.

- JAMES HENDRICKSON

You guys get my creative juices flowing. Love the photos—they're so bold and dramatic—makes me want to shoot. Keep up the great work and stay a cut above the rest of the rags out there.

- H. MENDOZA

I've always been extremely passionate about ink, and your magazine really brings light to this culture. You guys have the most amazing images—so much eye candy. I just

want you guys to know you're doing a great service to the culture and kudos!

- KEYAN P.

I love that the style of the magazine is dark, sexy, and bold. I feel I can never get tired of looking through it, and it inspires so many great ideas within me. I absolutely can't wait for some new ink now. Thanks for feeding my addiction!

- GRACE P.

I have been reading Bound-By Ink Magazine since it started. It's still as good and entertaining as the first day I picked it up. Every time, I go to Target, I always pick up a copy to read during my lunch breaks. Keep up the good work because this magazine will be my top favorite for a long time.

- SANDY L.

This is the first time I've ever written in about any magazine. I just had to write and give a big thank you for taking the time to write good stories, snap the most excellent photography, and supply us with an original magazine. I've never read a magazine quite like this one, and it always surpasses any others that I've picked up. The content is real and fun. Thanks again to the all the writers and staff who have made this magazine such a huge success..

- ELIZABETH C.

What can I say? This magazine has surpassed all of my expectations for a tattoo magazine. Usually, tattoo magazines are very plain and not very entertaining.

This magazine on the other hand is the polar opposite! I enjoy reading it all the time and will be keeping my subscription for years and years to come. By the way, I love the dual covers!!!!

- AMY V.

Just got through looking at Altered Egos, the special collector's edition, and would like to say that Andy Hartmark is amazing. His photography is killer. So much emotion. A picture speaks a thousand words can't even do it justice. Keep it up.

- MIKE F.

A tattoo is like a universal language that everyone will understand. Yeah, everyone can interpret the images a different way, but there's usually some sort of meaning behind it to the person, and people with tattoos understand each other in that sense. Love reading through BBI when you guys cover events in different countries that I can't go to but can experience through your pictures and thorough articles. Thanks, guys, I'm always looking for the next issue.

- R. GALINDO

What I like about BBI is that you guys write about real people that we can relate to. Like about Christiano Bollini, who has that pizza shop in Monterey Park. How he struggled from being an orphan from the age of 12 to working dead-end odd jobs at a young age. After all the hardships, he now can say he's a successful chef with his own restaurant. That's motivation and that's what I love about the magazine; it's not all

about the ink, but about people and their lives. . . and the ink on their body that shows those struggles.

- M. SAKATANI

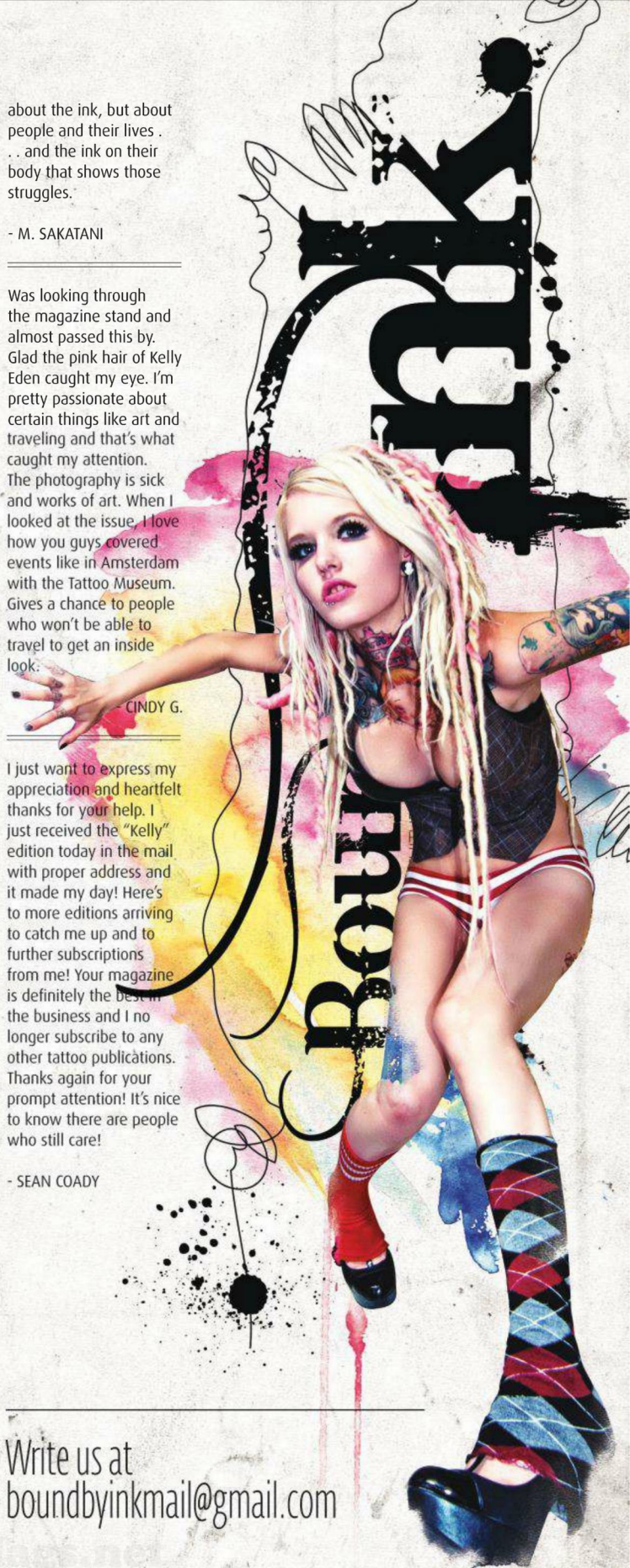
Was looking through the magazine stand and almost passed this by. Glad the pink hair of Kelly Eden caught my eye. I'm pretty passionate about certain things like art and traveling and that's what caught my attention. The photography is sick and works of art. When I looked at the issue, I love how you guys covered events like in Amsterdam with the Tattoo Museum. Gives a chance to people who won't be able to travel to get an inside look.

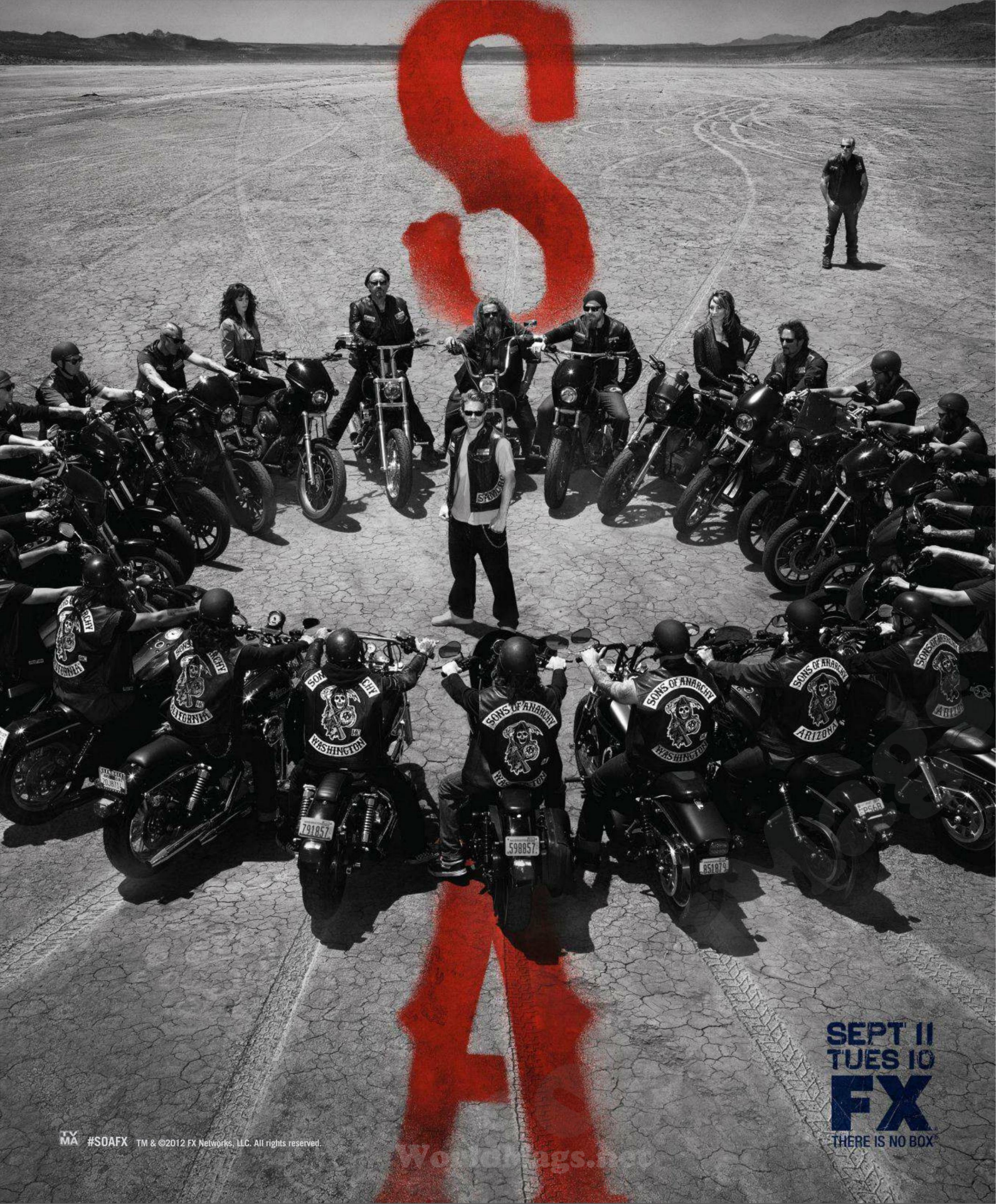
CINDY G.

I just want to express my appreciation and heartfelt thanks for your help. I just received the "Kelly" edition today in the mail with proper address and it made my day! Here's to more editions arriving to catch me up and to further subscriptions from me! Your magazine is definitely the best in the business and I no longer subscribe to any other tattoo publications. Thanks again for your prompt attention! It's nice to know there are people who still care!

- SEAN COADY

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SEPT 11
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THERE IS NO BOX

The Stationery Collection


Text: Rich Coyle



**"I ENJOY THE WHOLE PROCESS OF CREATION-
FROM THE VERY BEGINNING TO THE END:
IDEA, WORK ON THE WORKBENCH, AND
MOST OF ALL THE REACTION OF THE CLIENT.
THE MOST DIFFICULT THING FOR ME IS TO BE
SATISFIED WITH THE RESULT. I'M SEARCHING
FOR PERFECTION ALL THE TIME."**

- VLADIMIR MARKIN

The discussion of jewelry has always focused on its prime eloquence—the ultimate symbol of man's crafting precision in which mesmerizing intricacy and unique ideas mesh with all those notions condensed into an unassumingly magnificent product. As a result, jewelers must possess patience, diligence, and chastity, all of which ultimately culminate into their creations. That said, check out the works of artisan and jeweler Vladimir Markin. With more than 15 years of experience under his belt, trust us when we say he knows his stuff,

as evidenced by what has materialized in his Stationery Collection. Drawing inspiration from ordinary stationery, Markin has affectionately adorned these household items with the prestige of precious metals forged in the Earth and developed by man. It is Markin's paid homage to the common, humbler tools of creation, a return to the basic concepts of the daily grind. In short, the Stationery Collection is a passionate tribute to the phenomenon of productivity that anybody would be amazed and inspired by. Two words: simply amazing. 



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A FABEL FOR THE AGES

With the world as her backdrop, model, artist, and photographer
Sara Fabel develops a style and a following all her own.

Text: Mike Landers | Photos: Andy Hartmark
SaraFabel.com

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OUTFIT: VENUS PROTOTYPE LATEX





"A LOT OF PEOPLE KNOW ME FROM MODELING OR PHOTOGRAPHY. AS I GET OLDER, I HOPE TO BE MORE RECOGNIZED FOR MY ARTWORK, BUT FOR NOW I SEEM TO BE LIVING MY LIFE ON INSTAGRAM [LAUGHS]."

As you turn back the pages of the story that is Sara Fabel, you peel back the layers of true beauty in its most honest form. She is stunning in every sense of the word. With a style that blends soft femininity with a refined strength and power, her beauty is widely becoming the stuff of Instagram legend. However, this gorgeous nymph has graced the covers of numerous industry magazines, catwalks in Europe,

music videos, and dozens of photo shoots with prominent photographers the world over, making her much more than an Internet phenomenon. A faerie of the suitcase, this well-traveled model, artist, and aspiring tattooist has spread her wings across a number of continents, cities, states, and provinces, and her stunning portfolio is one that every model or artist might envy. Her beauty is no fable, and her drawings, picture frames, photography, and tattoo designs make her all the more stunning, as

the beauty Sara exudes is projected from the purist of places: her heart. Why then, if this creative soul has so much to offer, was she rejected by society as a child? Because life is cruel, and the bullying that Sara endured as a child was no fable; it was all too real. Her native Finland proved to be a breeding ground for unhappiness, and she found herself victimized at an early age. "Finland has one of the lowest birthrates and highest suicide rates in the world," Sara explains via Skype. "I was different

from a lot of other kids. I just liked drawing by myself. I was a tomboy, and I think that other kids didn't like that, especially the girls." Finland's loss was the world's gain, as Sara chose to channel her experiences into attending the Helsinki School of Art and Design to become the teacher she always wished she had—the teacher that could relate to the kids who were different like she was. After teaching for a few years in Finland's primary schools, she traveled the world, ultimately ending up in



"CHILDREN HAVE THE WORLD AS A BLANK CANVAS. IT CAN BE THEIR PARENTS THAT MOST INFLUENCE THE WAY THEY SEE IT."

Brisbane, Australia, in her final year as a teen, and she has since taken the art world by storm.

Channeling a number of influences, it is the Middle Ages period that has struck Sara's fancy as an artist. "I'm really fascinated by the wood print style of art from that time period," she says. The influence shines through on much of her artwork, especially the tattoo flash she has created, as her style is more line-based than it is dimensionally shaded. She has done a few of her own tattoos by herself and has centered on printing the words and phrases she lives by all over her skin. These are the beliefs that define her moral compass, as she happily lives at the intersection of self-expression and open-mindedness, the only residence she can truly call home. "I do love Australia, though," says the frequent flyer mileage queen. "It is definitely where I want to ultimately stay, although I have a lot more traveling to do for now," she insists. She will have to, after all, as fans the world over are clamoring for more of Sara, both as a model and an artist. "I do love modeling, but I hope to be more known for my art when everything is all said and done," says the bespectacled siren on the other end of our Skype. Indeed this incredible artist will accomplish much in her career, whether she is her own or someone else's muse, but for now this pixie must continue

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OUTFIT: VENUS PROTOTYPE LATEX

to spread her wings and travel the world for inspiration. Fly, Sara, fly.

DID YOU SEEK HIGHER EDUCATION AS AN ARTIST?

Yes, but I went to become an art teacher. I'm a primary school art teacher, to be exact, which is grades 1-9 in Finland, where I'm from. I studied University of Art and Design in Helsinki.

WHAT MADE YOU MOVE FROM HELSINKI TO AUSTRALIA? AND DID YOUR PARENTS SUPPORT THE MOVE?

I've always traveled, ever since I was a kid. My mom sent me to the U.K. alone for the first time when I was 11, and I began to travel there a lot. As soon as I could travel by myself regularly at 18, and when the option came to do some exchange studies, I did them in Australia and I realized that Finland was not where I wanted to stay. It has one of the lowest birth rates and highest suicide rates in the world, and it's super depressing, and I decided to move to Australia. As for my parents, I've

always seen my life as my own, so I didn't really ask permission.

SO THEY JUST REALIZED YOU WERE GOING TO DO YOUR OWN THING AND TRAVEL THE WORLD?

Pretty much. I haven't lived in a country longer than eight months since I turned 18. I have been everywhere: Europe, the Middle East, Asia, China, Malaysia, Japan, New Zealand, the U.K., the coast of Africa, and even different parts of America. Australia is by far my favorite place.

WHAT IS IT ABOUT AUSTRALIA THAT HAS CAPTIVATED YOU?

People are different out here. They are very down to earth. People here don't have the enormous egos like they do in some other parts of the world. They're not caught up in the fame game; they just want to get to know you for you. Even in regards to politics and the economic system, Australia is the place to be. Everything is super safe; you don't have to lock your door. You can just mind your own business and do what you want to do.

AS A TEACHER, WHAT DO YOU WANT TO COMMUNICATE MOST TO YOUR STUDENTS?

I want them to know that you can be whoever you want to be. Even if you are different, it doesn't make anybody better or worse than anybody else. If someone is bullied because of their looks, I wanted to be the teacher that could reach them because I know what they are going through because it happened to me. I'm dyslexic, and I was bullied at school until the age of 19. I was

also a very ugly duckling, and the kids didn't like me because I was different. I feel like most of the teachers didn't understand me at certain times, and I didn't want to be like them. I wanted to be someone that my students could talk to confidently because I could relate to them.

MOST PEOPLE WOULD FIND IT HARD TO BELIEVE THAT A MODEL WOULD HAVE ISSUES LIKE THAT. WAS IT YOUR LOOKS? WHY DID THE KIDS GIVE YOU SUCH A ROUGH TIME GROWING UP?





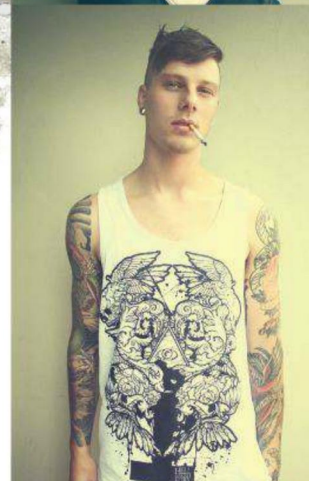
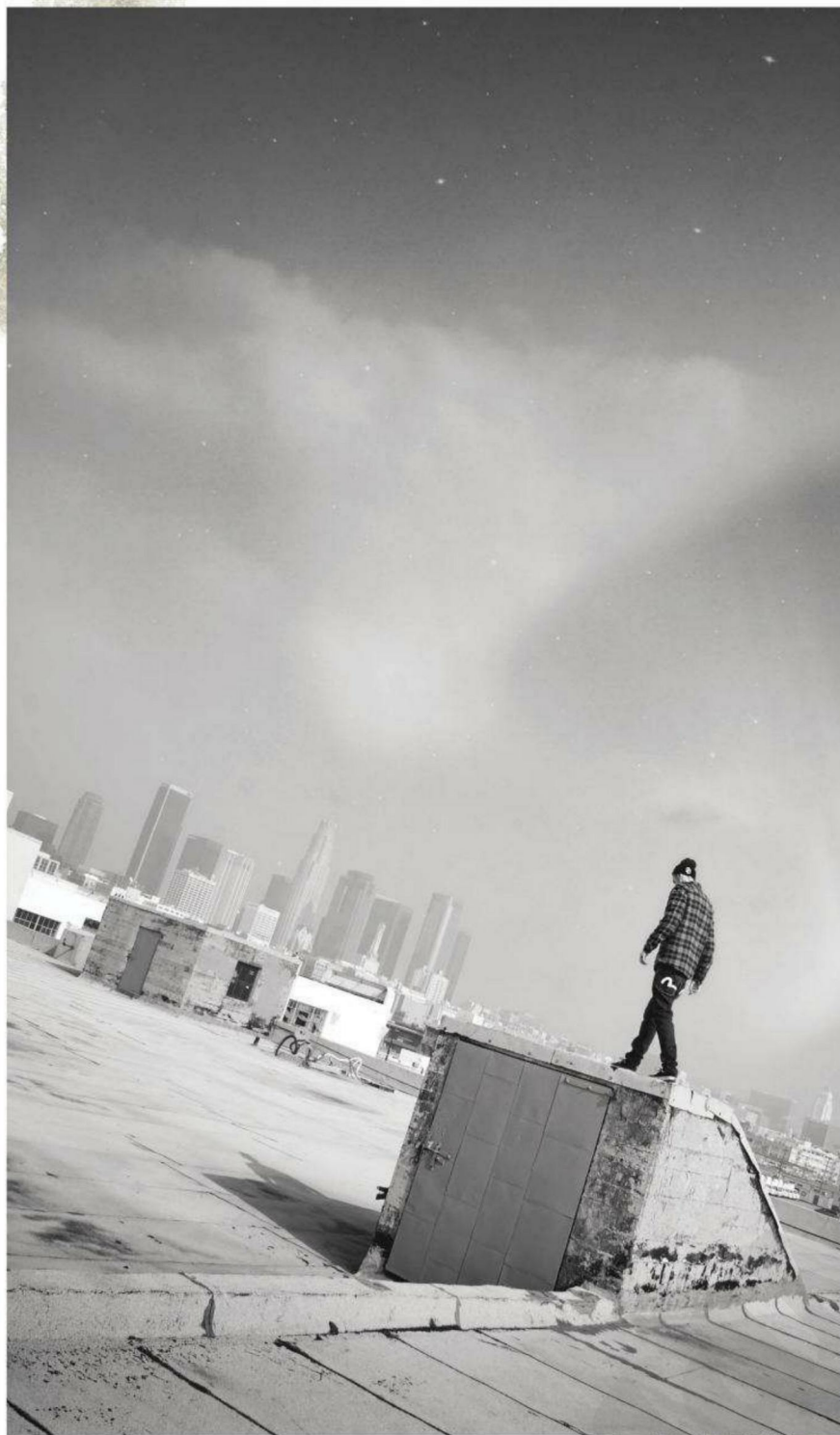
"AS A TATTOOIST I WANT TO DO COLOR TATTOOS. I ENJOY DRAWING THAT WAY AND I REALIZE THE STYLE I LIKE TATTOOED ON MYSELF IS NOT WHAT EVERYBODY WANTS, SO I WANT TO LEARN TO BE A COLOR ARTIST."

It was just the social dynamic. Once you get that stamp that you're different, that's it. You don't necessarily have to look different—there are no set rules—but they will pick on whatever they find. There's no one thing that gives you that stigma. I got glasses when I was in first grade and it started there. Kids thought I was super weird because I liked to sit and draw instead of playing and gossiping. I was a total tomboy, and I liked playing with the guys, and the females just always thought I was too different.

GIVEN YOUR STYLE, IT'S SAFE TO SAY THAT YOU'RE THE "COOL" TEACHER. DO YOU FEEL THAT YOU HAVE A BETTER RAPPORT WITH KIDS THAN TEACHERS WITH A MORE CONSERVATIVE PHYSICAL STYLE?

Occasionally, but I have less of a good response from the parents. They don't think that a person that looks like me can be a good influence on their children. Working with the children is easy, but the parents can be the most difficult to deal with sometimes because they judge me negatively on my looks.

YOUR SENSE OF INDIVIDUALITY WAS YOUR BIGGEST CROSS TO BEAR AS A CHILD, BUT AS AN ADULT IT HAS BEEN YOUR BIGGEST



Aside from modeling, Sara Fabel is also a captivating artist. Here are some examples of her illustrious line art and mystique photography.

ASSET. DID YOU FEEL ANY VINDICATION TOWARD THE BULLIES OF YOUR PAST AS YOU BEGAN TO SUCCEED IN YOUR CAREER?

Not really. Many of the kids that I went to school with that used to bully me didn't end up well, and I feel badly for how many of their lives turned out. It's sad, but the best reward is keeping going and focusing on myself instead of giving in to focusing on them. You can't become one of these adults that have always focused so much on other people's lives that you don't end up where you want to be.

DO YOU THINK THIS AGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ALLOWS FOR MORE BULLYING?

I don't think social media is the problem, and I know that kids aren't the problem. It's the grown-ups. Kids are growing up in families where their parents are judging their neighbors and their friends, looking at gossip magazines, and they think that's what life is about. Bullying and saying nasty things about people is going to happen with or without the Internet. It has always been around. You have to show kids how to deal with other people, to walk off and not say anything if you don't have anything good to say. Being mean to others isn't going to get you anywhere in life.

WHERE DO YOU ULTIMATELY WANT TO SEE YOURSELF?

I want to learn to be a great tattooist. I am still learning, and I have done a few out of my friend's shop, and I will hopefully be starting an apprenticeship soon.

THE TATTOOS YOU HAVE ARE ALL BLACK AND GRAY. WHY DO YOU WANT TO DO COLOR TATTOOS?

Yes, I don't have any color tattoos. I just have line work. My favorite form of art is woodcut drawings,





which is an old Middle Ages art form from the 1500s and 1600s. Pictures were carved into wood and printed at that time, so you wouldn't have any color or shading on it, and I want to be true to that. My favorite is Albrecht Durer. Many of the woodcut pieces don't have the actual creators documented, so there are a ton of great artists from that time period that remain unknown.

WHAT DOES THE TATTOO ON YOUR LEG SAY?

It says, "Long is the way, and hard, that out of Hell leads up to the light,"

which is a quote from John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. I also have, "Nothing good ever comes without hard work," and "The night is always the darkest before the dawn." I have a lot of words and phrases that I live by tattooed on me.

HOW MANY TATTOOS DO YOU HAVE?

At this point I've lost count [laughs]. I don't know. I'd say maybe around 100 hours' worth? My tattoos are starting to merge into one another, but I don't regret any of the tattoos I have at all. I don't think you should, either.

YOU'VE TATTOOED SOME OF YOUR OWN TATTOOS AS WELL, RIGHT?

Yes, I've done both of my thighs, my knee, and the Tree of Eden tattoo that I have.

WHO ARE SOME OF THE TATTOO ARTISTS THAT INSPIRE YOU?

I don't really keep up with the who's who of tattooing or anything, but I really like guys like Adam Pasquali and David Olteanu.

WHAT ARE YOUR FAVORITE MEDIUMS AS AN ARTIST?

I use a few different

methods. Sometimes I'll sketch things and transfer them to my computer and I'll add to them using graphic programs like Photoshop.

WHAT'S SOMETHING PEOPLE MIGHT NOT KNOW ABOUT YOU THAT MIGHT SURPRISE THEM?

I don't like hard-core punk music. People always assume I'm into super heavy music like punk or metal. I pretty much like anything else. Also, I don't shave my head because of Skrillex [laughs].

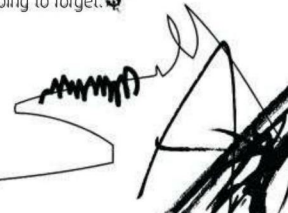
AS A MODEL, WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR MOST

MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE?

I had a catwalk event in Europe one time, and it was a streetwear fashion show. There were 30 or so industry models, and then there were four of us who weren't serious models. There was me, my friend, a porn star, and another person, and they wanted us to just go wild on the catwalk. We had a great time just laughing and doing what we wanted to do, but I don't think the industry models were too happy [laughs].

WE HAVE A LOT OF YOUNG READERS OR THOSE WHO HAVE CHILDREN. WHAT

WOULD YOU SAY TO THEM SO THAT THEY MIGHT AVOID THE PITFALLS OF BULLYING?

Surround yourself with good people. If someone gives you a hard time or bullies you, just let go of that person, even if they are in your family or if they are your boss. Surround yourself with people that you can trust. You're not the center of the universe if you make mistakes, because good people are not going to care, they're going to forget. 

TIRADO V DESIGN

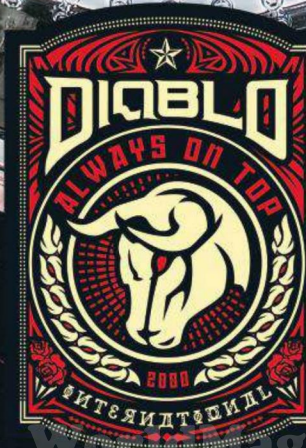
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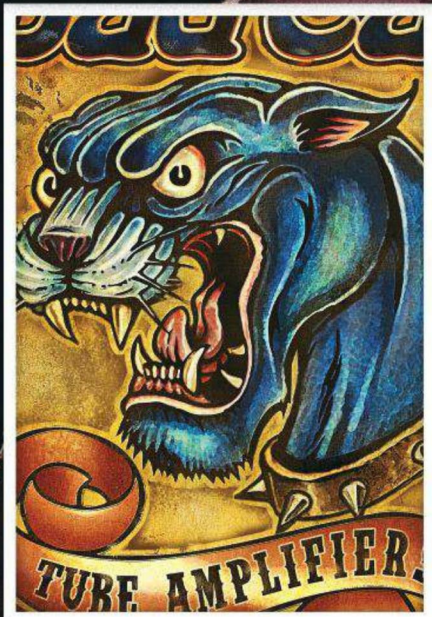
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FEATURED ARTIST

(ADDITIONAL ARTISTS
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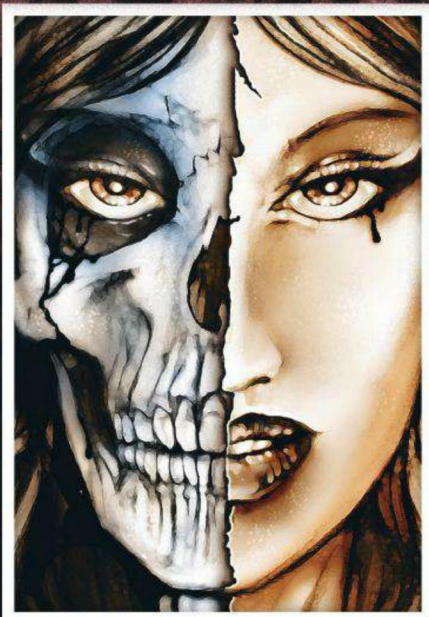
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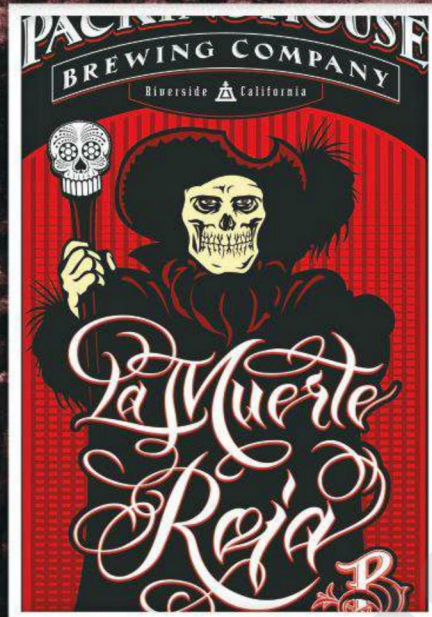
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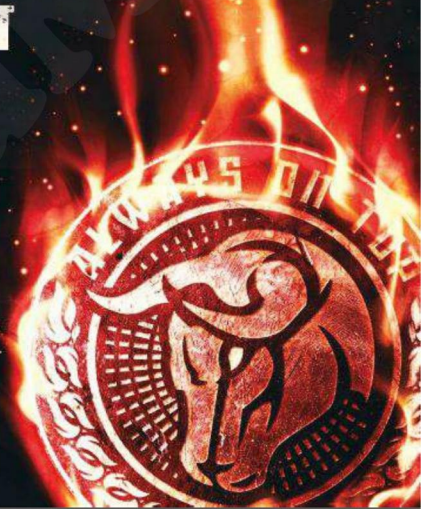
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YOU CAN'T SAVE ME: THE SLOW BURN OF RICHIE KOTZEN

The music business can be many things to many people, but for critically acclaimed guitar legend Richie Kotzen, it was simply a means to an end. This incredibly talented musician has survived in this tumultuous industry and achieved a level of success that many musicians can only dream of. More important, he's done it on his terms.

Text: Mike Landers | Photos: Andy Hartmark
RichieKotzen.com

An unusually lazy Friday afternoon sweeps over guitar legend Richie Kotzen's Los Angeles home, and the mood is akin to a desert oasis for Richie, exhausted after just returning the previous day from the final stops on a grueling European tour. He looks every bit the rock star and guitar god you'd expect, complete with leather pants, tattoos, and a lanky frame that can only come from hours of playing his signature-model Fender Stratocasters and Telecasters on stage in front of throngs of adoring devotees. On the walls are a variety of RIAA Gold and Platinum certifications, foreign puppets and tapestries, and even a picture of a young Richie with the Greatest of All Time, Muhammad Ali. I'm most intrigued by a collage of memories from Richie's '06 "A Bigger Bang" Japanese tour with the Rolling Stones, an experience Richie is quick to downplay. "Everything happens so gradually, and there's so much disappointment in the music business that you get to a point where when something incredible happens, it's almost too surreal to believe that it actually happened," he says dryly, fixing a necklace that has seen its share of wear and tear from life on the road. Indeed, many incredible things have happened in this musician's life. In addition to the Platinum and Gold plaques that adorn his walls, his song *Shine*, which Richie wrote as a part of the rock



group Mr. Big, went on to top the *Billboard* charts in Europe and Japan. Another tune penned by Richie, *Stand*, written while he was a member of the band Poison, reached the top 20 on the *Billboard* charts in the U.S., and his stint with that band helped him receive his own signature line of guitars from industry giant Fender. Richie was also asked to join a band helmed by legendary jazzman Stanley Clark, and the project yielded a tour that took him and the band to the Montreux Jazz Festival, among others. Perhaps Richie's most notable achievement is his career itself—a 20-year career that has yielded 25 albums (20 as a solo act) and showcased his incredible duties as a songwriter, guitarist, and a vocalist. "I started off being known as 'a guitar player's guitar player,' but I wanted to do my own stuff all along. I remember barely being able to play and trying to write songs as a kid," Richie says during a break in our photo shoot. That do-it-yourself approach has been the key to Richie's success, as his independent fan base has led to tours that have spanned several continents, including North America, Europe, South America, and Asia. "I have a fan base that allows me to travel all over the world because they will come and see me play; they know what I do. That connection is all I care about, I live for that."

Indeed, Richie Kotzen is far removed from his humble beginnings growing up in Reading, Pennsylvania, a suburban hamlet located just outside Philadelphia. The amalgam of music Richie was exposed to as a child via Philadelphia radio was a hodgepodge of Philadelphia International soul records produced by the likes of Gamble



and Huff and hard rock records from giants like Led Zeppelin and Jimi Hendrix. The combination shaped who Richie is as a musician, and his eclectic influences would prove, like many things in his life, to be both a gift and a curse. As a guitarist, the riffs and melodies ran the safer gamut of hard rock, but as a vocalist, Richie's soul and bluesy stylings were undeniable—something that the record companies would later admonish him for. "Everywhere I went, they kept saying, 'You sound too black,'" Richie laments. His experiences in a cover band had the budding axman touring seedy nightclubs as a teenager, and recognition soon came via rock guru Mike Varney, who wrote a review on Richie in *Guitar Player* magazine's coveted Spotlight column before signing Richie to his label, Shrapnel Records. Success with his subsequent releases led Richie to California, and the guitarist has not relented since, despite facing several ups and downs in the recording industry and in his personal relationships. When the industry tried to pigeonhole him as an '80s rocker thanks to his stint with Poison, Richie simply put his head down, got to work in his studio, and did what Richie Kotzen has always done: made great records on his terms.

That work ethic and sense of control stems from his father, a man he says "is good at everything." Lest you think it's merely musician's ego at work, it's not. "I tend to hear song ideas in complete thoughts," Richie says. Naturally, it is not uncommon for him to record all the parts of a song, from drums to guitar to bass to keys, in order to capture the sound he's looking for. "If I'm in a situation where I hear something that

"IF EVERYBODY WILL EAT SHIT, WHY BOTHER MAKING GOOD FOOD? EVENTUALLY PEOPLE WILL FORGET HOW TO MAKE GOOD FOOD AND PRETTY SOON THERE WON'T BE ANY GOOD FOOD FOR THE PEOPLE THAT LIKE TO EAT IT. THAT ANALOGY APPLIES TO EVERYTHING—TECHNOLOGY, THE ECONOMY, EVERYTHING—AND IT'S DANGEROUS FOR US AS A SOCIETY."

I physically don't have the development to play, then I'll call someone in who can play it. That happens all the time. I'm not trying to control everything. It's a creative process." This creative process has extended to his intricately customized Los Angeles home and home studio, remodeled and customized by Richie himself with assistance from his crafty father. In 2012, Richie's footprint on the musical landscape is as firm as it ever was, and his independence and resolve have only increased his career satisfaction. "I'm happier than I have ever been," he says contagiously in his home office. Indeed he is, and it is obvious why Richie Kotzen can't be saved: He doesn't need to be. He's reached a salvation of success that has eluded so many others within the music industry simply because he understands the one thing all musicians should always believe in: themselves.

WHEN DID YOU GET INTO MUSIC?

I started when I was around 5 years old. I guess I wanted attention because I was constantly trying to entertain the family [laughs]. My parents had me take piano lessons for about a year then, and I didn't like it. I liked the music, but I think I was too young. When I turned 7, I was at a yard sale, and there was a guitar there, and I wanted it, and my dad was willing to get it for me—as long as it didn't turn out like my piano lesson. I took it to the guitar teacher we found and he said it was unplayable and that he

couldn't teach me on it. My first guitar was a Gibson Marauder, and I remember being terrified of my guitar teacher. He had long, red hair, a red beard, looked like your typical Pennsylvania biker. He was pretty intimidating.

HOW DID YOU GET OVER YOUR INTIMIDATION OF HIM AND LEARN TO PLAY?

Through time, I think. I became fond of his teaching and became less afraid to learn. Although I probably got good out of fear of what would happen if I didn't do well in the lessons [laughs].

WHAT OTHER FORMS OF MUSICAL EDUCATION DID YOU RECEIVE? WAS YOUR PROWESS MOSTLY SELF-TAUGHT?

I worked with him as long as I could, but he quit teaching for whatever reasons, so I found a new teacher. By the time I was 16, I didn't have any instructors; the rest of what I learned came from trial and error and playing with people that were older than me. That was the key. When I was 15-16 years old, I started playing with older guys that were working the Pennsylvania/New Jersey club scene, and we would do gigs. By the time I was 17, we were playing four nights a week.

DID YOU HAVE DIFFICULTIES BEING SO YOUNG IN TERMS OF WORKING IN NIGHTCLUBS?

My father would always be there, so I didn't need to sneak in. He ended up becoming the manager of the cover band that I was playing in, and he booked

us all over Delaware, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. As a teenager, I was making really good money just playing in this cover band. It was great business at the time, but I was ready to move on before too long.

WHY DID YOU STOP PLAYING WITH THE BAND?

I started to hate it by the time I was 17 because I wanted to make my own music ever since I was a little kid. We made an EP with that band, and we had interest from Sony from a guy who wanted to hear more music, but while I was ready, the guys in the band weren't really able to get it together at the time. I needed to do my own thing.

HOW DID YOU BEGIN YOUR SOLO CAREER?

There was a column in Guitar Player Magazine called Spotlight for New Talent, and the guy who wrote that column found a lot of guys who went on to become famous. Guys like Yngwie Malmsteen, Paul Gilbert, and others. I was fortunate enough that he did a write-up on me when I was 17 and signed me to his label when I was 18. By the time I graduated from high school, I left Pennsylvania for San Francisco to make my first record.

YOUR STYLE SEEMS TO BE A HYBRID OF MULTIPLE GENRES. SINCE YOU DIDN'T TAKE A TON OF MUSICAL EDUCATION FOR GUITAR PLAYING, WHY DO YOU THINK YOU HAVE SUCH A UNIQUE SOUND?

I think it was a direct result of the era and place I

grew up in. I grew up just outside of Philadelphia listening to Philadelphia radio, so there was a lot of R&B music, which my father was into, and this was the '70s, so my mom was into all the rock stuff. She had seen [Jimi] Hendrix, the Beatles, Blood, Sweat, and Tears, and all that music was played in my house constantly. That's where my style came from. Being a guitar player, naturally the rock stuff was what I gravitated to, but as a vocalist, I leaned more toward the R&B influence. When I write songs, it's all about the lyrics I'm singing, and that's why my music has such a combination of rock and R&B.

GIVEN THE DIFFERENCE IN YOUR ROCK AND R&B INFLUENCES, HOW DID YOU APPROACH YOUR FIRST SOLO RECORDINGS?

I got the label deal with a company called Shrapnel, and they were putting out these crazy guitar-oriented records that featured metal guys playing in a far more advanced sense than what anyone had done in that genre. It was like taking Eddie Van Halen and speeding up the record twice as fast. I became a part of that crew and started making these instrumental guitar-shredding records, and I made two. One album was completely instrumental, and the other had my vocals on it.

DID YOU HAVE ANY TREPIDATION ABOUT SINGING ON A RECORD, GIVEN YOUR HISTORY BEING KNOWN PRIMARILY AS A GUITAR PLAYER?

It was actually more of

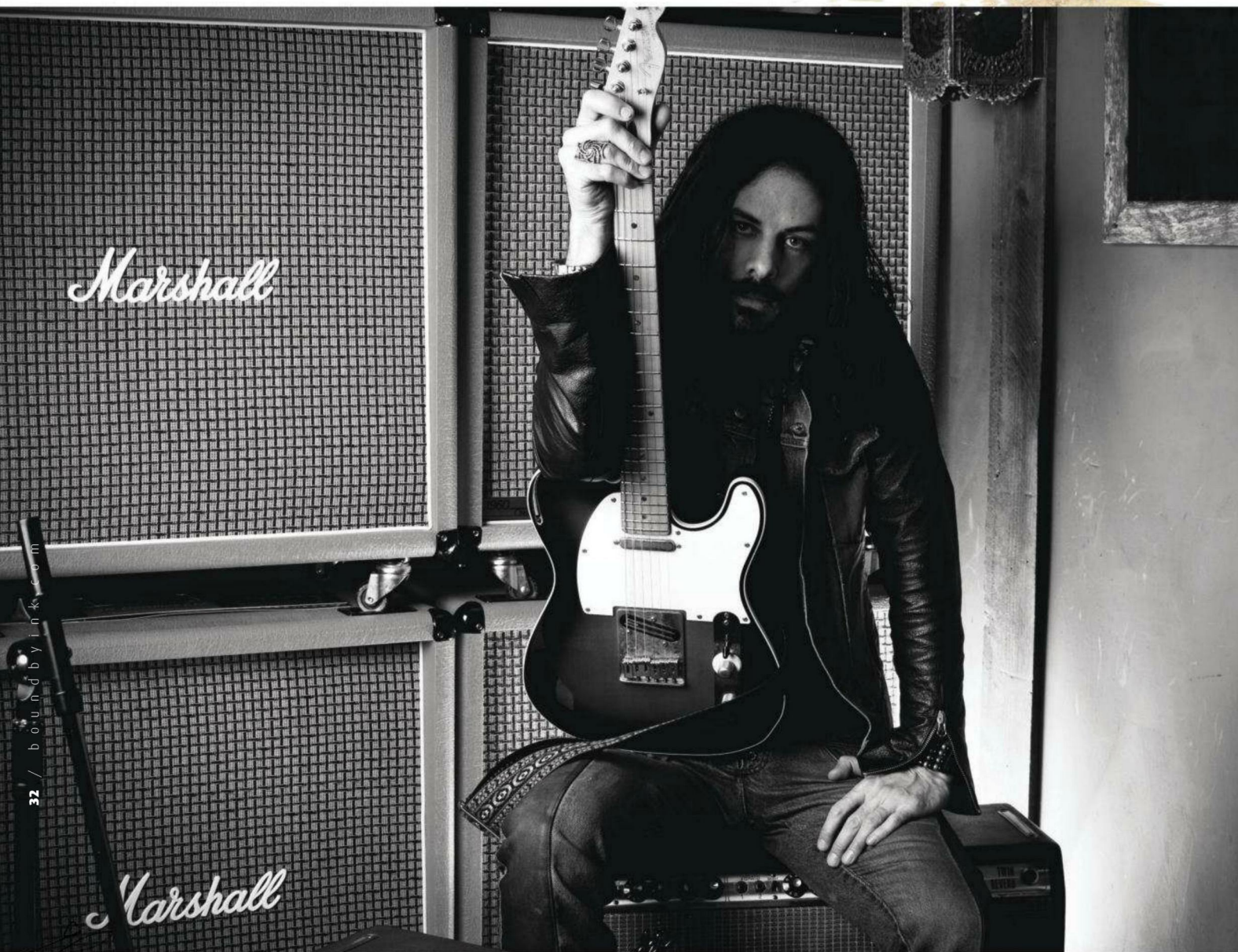
a relief. By the time I did that first record, I knew I didn't want to be an instrumentalist, I sing as well, that's half of what I do. I made the record and I had gotten interest from Interscope, which was small at the time and nothing like it is now. They bought my contract from Shrapnel after my second record. As part of the buyout, I needed to deliver another record to Shrapnel, but the compromise was that I would give Shrapnel an instrumental record so it wouldn't interfere with releasing a vocal album on Interscope.

HOW DID YOUR DEAL WITH INTERSCOPE PLAY OUT? DID THE ALBUM MEET YOUR EXPECTATIONS?

I moved to L.A. and found myself writing with all these great people, including Danny Kortchmar, who was set to produce my record. I was thrilled because I loved his work on the Don Henley *End of the Innocence* record. I wanted to make a blue-eyed soul record like the groups I had grown up on in the '70s but heavier and with badass guitar playing. I saw the vision in my head so perfectly, and Danny did, too. The label didn't, and they said, "No, you're not going to make that record. We don't see you as that." I was so pissed. In retrospect, I may have been a bit overly ambitious at that time, but regardless, it was my music. I'm 21-22 years old and the record executives literally kept telling me that I sounded "too black." It drove me insane because this is what I fucking sound like! It's where I'm from and my influences. I'm not trying







to sound like anything, this is just how I sing. The fact that I don't just sound like everybody else is why you signed me in the first place! This is pretty much the saga of the industry. Interscope did let me out of my contract and they could have trapped me, so I respect them for doing that.

WHAT WAS YOUR NEXT MOVE? DID YOU TRY TO RELEASE THE ALBUM ANYWHERE ELSE?

No, when I received word from the label that the LP was dead in the water, one of the things that was said to me in that termination was, "I don't think you're ready to make a record yet. I'm going to let you go. I think you're an amazing talent, however, there's something you should be aware of. The guys from Poison have been calling me about you, and I think it's something you should look into. After you're done with that,

come back to me and maybe we can make the record that we both want to make."

WHAT DID YOU DECIDE TO DO?

I was still intent on making my solo career happen. I figured, if I could be in their band and still have a solo career and bounce back in forth, that'd be great, so my first reaction was to give it a shot. I went to Bret Michaels'

house in Calabasas. He was one of the nicest guys I'd ever met and said we really like what you do, we'd like you to join our band, but we need to play with you to see if we like you because we are checking out one other guy. I was excited about the opportunity. We worked together for a couple of weeks, and then they sat me down and they started talking like I wasn't going to make it. I started to interrupt

them because I was still pretty young and cocky and they said "How do you feel about playing in arenas?" I realized I had gotten the gig and I was stoked. I loved it! It was a great experience, and I think we made a great record together. I wrote a couple of our stronger songs on the album, which was cool, and the Poison dynamic was that we all shared equal [songwriting] publishing. I was cool with that format because

I think that if you really are a band, that's how you should divide your publishing monies.

YOU HAD OBVIOUSLY JOINED ONE OF THE MORE POPULAR AND SUCCESSFUL ROCK ACTS IN AMERICA. WHY DID YOU PART WAYS?

Somewhere along the line, things got really fucking dark. What happened was that the music industry all of a sudden decided there was no room for bands



like Poison. And I gotta say this, the fact of the matter is that out of all those bands back then that were releasing albums, ours was the only one that went Gold immediately, and we had the potential to do really well. The first single did great and they fucked around in releasing our second single and decided to use a ballad, which proved to be a very huge mistake. MTV just decided simply, "No." They weren't playing our video anymore, and this is a band that had one of the highest-grossing rock tours ever, according to *People* magazine. It was tough for the guys to take, and the guys in the band got difficult to deal with because everything had changed so much for them. We had internal drama that caused the split, and I was back to being solo again.

WHAT DID YOU DO NEXT?
WERE YOU DISCOURAGED?

I was, but I also still had my own musical dreams, so I pushed forward. When it started getting ugly, I immediately went back to San Francisco, made a demo tape, and a manager I knew in Philly came out to L.A. and helped me to get signed to Geffen within a week after making the demo. The guy in [Geffen's] office says to me, "I'm really impressed about what you're trying to do. I'm even more impressed that you got kicked out of Poison. That to me is the epitome of rock n' roll." I was stunned. He had no idea what happened in that situation. I'm sitting here serious about music and looking at him like, "Wow, you better give me a ton of money," and they did. They gave me a huge advance and did nothing, because by the time they were ready to release my record, the industry was all about grunge and my record was more suited to like opening up for the Black Crowes or something.

**"IF SOMETHING
ISN'T ROOTED
IN BLUES, IT
DOES NOTHING
FOR ME. I
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CONSTRUCTION
OUTSIDE."**

DID YOU FEEL LIKE PEOPLE DIDN'T WANT WHAT YOU HAD? I MEAN, YOU COULD SING, WRITE, AND PRODUCE YOUR OWN RECORDS AND YOU WERE IN POISON, YOU'D THINK SOME COMPANY WOULD WANT TO TAKE A CHANCE ON YOUR TALENTS?

It was a gift and a curse. After leaving Poison, throughout the entire '90s, all I kept hearing from people about why my record wasn't getting signed or promoted was because of Poison. "How do we market your record without alluding to the fact that you were in Poison?" To me it was silly because the people that will buy my records wouldn't be Poison fans anyway because my music was very different from what we were doing in that band. I didn't need to be marketed as having been in Poison. Poison became the biggest thing to ever happen to me and the biggest obstacle I ever had to overcome. There was a six-year period where I couldn't even get arrested [laughs]. It created a situation where I ended up making some better records later on, and I wouldn't change anything.

HOW DID YOU RELEASE MUSIC IF THE LABELS WEREN'T BEING RECEPTIVE TO YOU?

I started making records in the mid-'90s that were funded by Japanese record companies; this was very



common back then. I was having problems getting a label deal in the States because of the whole Poison stigma, but Japan was different. I made about four or five records for Japan from '96-'99, and I started touring there.

DID THINGS BEGIN TO LOOK UP FOR YOU THEN?

Yes and no. I had bought my house but soon found myself in a real bad place, personally, financially, career-wise, pretty much all aspects of my life. I was going through a horrible divorce, I couldn't get a deal, everything was fucked up. It was amazing that I was able to keep my house. I remember playing for this artist that had a deal and I was backing them on stage and miserable. The artist was good, I just wasn't in that mind frame.

WHAT TURNED THINGS AROUND?

I got a call from the manager that got me the Geffen deal, and he said he was managing [jazz legend] Stanley Clarke and that Stanley needed a guitar player for a band that he was starting. He played him one of my records (I had done a jazz-fusion record in the past), and he liked it and wanted to meet me. I was totally off guard because Stanley is a legend and I'm not much of a jazz player. I went to the audition and they put sheet music in front of me and I started laughing. Stanley said, "What's so funny?" I said, "This might as well be like a French novel." He laughed, too, and sat at the piano, and we went through [the music] by ear and played for two hours. It was Stanley, Lenny White, Karen Briggs and I. I said, "I know you guys aren't going to hire me, but it was an honor to play with you guys." I get home and there's a message on my answering machine that I got the gig. We went to

the Bay Area and made the record for Sony. We did a big European tour and played at all the jazz festivals. It was the biggest education for me and such an honor to be in a band with Stanley Clarke, especially for me not being a jazz guy.

DID YOU KEEP PLAYING WITH STANLEY OR FOCUS ON YOUR SOLO MATERIAL?

I got a call from Eric Martin from the band Mr. Big, and he said that Paul [Gilbert] had left Mr. Big and the band wanted to continue and bring me on board. I was extremely shy due to the backlash I received from the Poison era, but two guys from the band came to my house in L.A. after I came back from touring with Stanley and made their pitch. I chose to do it. Billy is an amazing musician and has become a great friend, and I had a lot of fun playing with them. Their music and what they do was much more in line with where I was coming from, so we worked well together and it was a great experience. By the time that group ended, all this Internet stuff was starting to happen, and I saw a way that I could control my musical life again.

HOW DID YOU USE THE INTERNET TO LIBERATE YOUR CAREER? HOW DOES IT FEEL TO BE SO IN CONTROL OF YOUR MUSICAL DESTINY?

It wasn't until I made a record called *Get Up* that I started to get control of my career. By the time I got to the record *Into the Black*, I was fully in control of my art. Being able to release the records online on my terms gave me a freedom I had never felt before. I wasn't trying to make a record, I was just recording songs, and this process made *Into the Black* one of my better records. From that point on, everything changed. I realized that I don't have to do anything

I don't want to do. I'm so happy, I haven't been this happy, ever. Now I'm in a situation where I'm making music that I love, I have people all over the world that I can share it with. It's much better than being in a label office with someone telling me you sound too black or you need to appeal to this audience. I don't have to do that anymore.

WHAT MAKES A GREAT SONG?

Your perspective as a songwriter is what makes a great song. We're all writing about the same things—finding love, losing love, having success, having failure—you're writing about human experience. What changes is not those things, it's the perspective of those things, that's where the inspiration comes. If I'm in a bubble and not experiencing things, I'm not gonna be able to write. I have to experience things, and a song will come from that. When I wrote the *Into the Black* record I was in a more depressed mode, and when I wrote the record called *Mother Head's Family Reunion*, I was madly in love at the time. Is the subject matter different in those two records? No, but the perspective is. As far as writing a song, it's almost like a muscle that develops over time. Not every song is a masterpiece lyrically; you have some that are more about the lyrics, and some where the lyrics are secondary and it's about the groove and the energy and feeling of it.

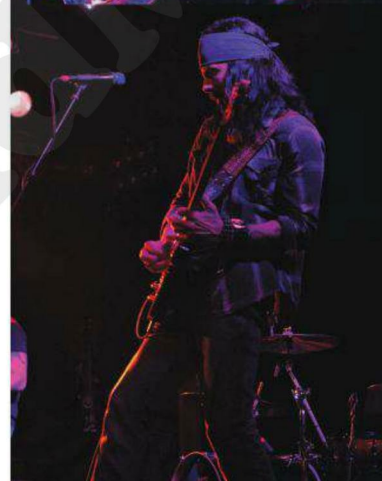
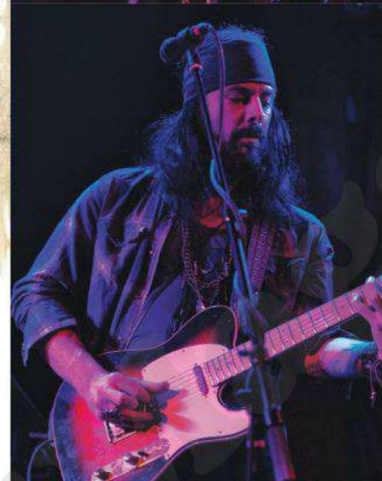
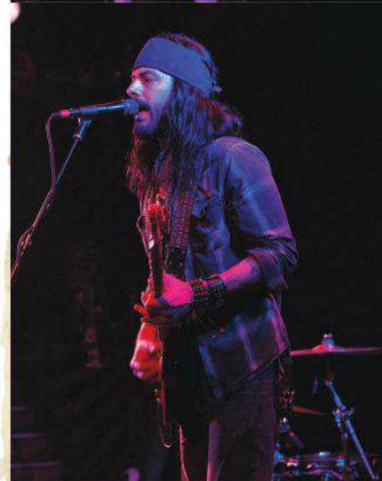
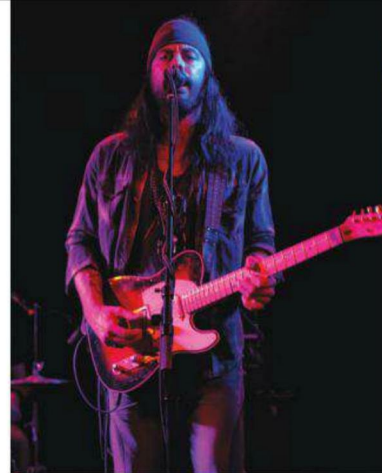
WHERE DID THE INSPIRATION FOR YOUR TATTOOS COME FROM?

The first tattoo was this little symbol that I kept drawing, and it was a cross with a half of a heart. I was very young when I met my ex-wife, and we were very much in love, so I took the symbol and put her name inside of it. I ran in randomly to some

dude and got it done and got what I consider to be one of the worst tattoos I've ever seen and it didn't look anything like my drawing. It sucked [laughs]. When the marriage went haywire, I got words around it that read, "Vows begin when hope dies," which is probably a pretty dark expression [laughs]. I got a kanji that read "Patience," however, I went to Japan and a guy said your kanji is not complete, so a guy in Osaka completed it around it. Then I went back to Osaka the following year and he did my dragon. My second favorite tattoo reads, "The thorns that I have reaped are off the seeds I've sewn." It's a philosophy that stems from the fact that I can't stand hearing people complain about how someone has done them wrong. A lot of people like to blame other people for why their life hasn't turned out the way they wanted it to go. We're all handed choices, and you make decisions, and decision have consequences good and bad, but you have to own up to that. You have more control over your life than you realize. My favorite tattoo is a picture that my ex-wife took of my daughter when she was a baby and sleeping. It says "Flesh of my Flesh, Blood of my Blood," and Tattoo Mike did such a great job on the portrait.

I UNDERSTAND YOU HAVE YOUR OWN SIGNATURE LINE OF GUITARS THROUGH FENDER, WHEN DID THIS HAPPEN? HOW DOES IT FEEL TO LITERALLY HAVE YOUR OWN GUITAR?

That evolved back when I was in Poison. I was in the studio in 1991, I had a deal with Ibanez, and they were making me [Fender] Telecaster copies. They were beautiful, too, under a company called Starfield, which was a new company that they were launching. The guy from Fender came down to give the bass



player [in Poison] a new Fender bass, and he saw all my Starfields and said, "I gotta get you something better." He came back two days later with a Red Stratocaster and a Tobacco Sunburst Telecaster and they became my main guitars. Fender made me six more custom guitars, and when I made that record for Geffen, we needed advertisement, so my manager approached Fender to do a full-page ad with me. Unfortunately, they were all booked for the year, but Fender Japan wanted to do a signature model, and they wanted to do two: a Telecaster and a Stratocaster. They've been in production since 1996, and there have been several incarnations: two different Stratocasters and maybe four Telecasters.

YOU HAD THE PLEASURE OF TOURING WITH THE ROLLING STONES. HOW DID THIS COME ABOUT?

The records I had released in Japan helped, and by 2006, I ended up opening for the Rolling Stones as a solo act. Obviously it was a huge honor and somewhat validating in the fact that it was me and my music; I wasn't a part of a different band. I didn't believe I was going to do it until after I did it, so the experience was just completely surreal to me.

YOU'VE HAD A CAREER THAT HAS SEEN YOU SUCCESSFUL BOTH HERE AND ABROAD, AS OPPOSED TO MANY AMERICAN MUSICIANS THAT SEEM TO DO BETTER OVERSEAS. WHY DO YOU THINK THERE'S SUCH A RISING SENTIMENT AMONG SOME MUSICIANS THAT THEY SEEM TO DO BETTER OUTSIDE THE UNITED STATES?

The bar of creativity in this country has been lowered, and we are getting to the point in this country where we aren't setting the trends, we're following





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them. We've become a media-driven society and that can be a bad thing in an artistic sense. Most people don't want art, they want a diversion, myself included. When you're done working all day, you want to turn off your brain, but there's less of a balance in terms of what big media decides to show consumers.

WHAT INSPIRES YOU NOW, AFTER WEATHERING THE STORM OF THE MUSIC INDUSTRY FOR SO LONG?

I have a 14-year-old daughter who plays a little guitar, and piano, and a couple of years ago, I put her in this thing called School of Rock to further her skills. I was amazed at how many kids there were into groups like Led Zeppelin and groups that were around way before their time. It showed me that they must be listening to other stuff. My daughter's band records in my home studio, and it's inspiring for me to hear them, not just because she's my child, but because I'm seeing a younger generation play good music with real instruments. Seeing their creativity in this age brings about hope for the future.

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD FOR RICHIE KOTZEN?

The latest record I have out is called *24 Hours*. This year, though, is all about playing live, I've finished the first leg of a European tour, and I've got a couple shows in between before I head to is Brazil, Argentina, and Chile. After that tour, I'm in the States for a bit before going back to Europe in September. I'm also in talks with Billy Sheehan from Mr. Big and Mike Portnoy from Dream Theater, and we've begun working on some tunes that we hope can land on a project together. 

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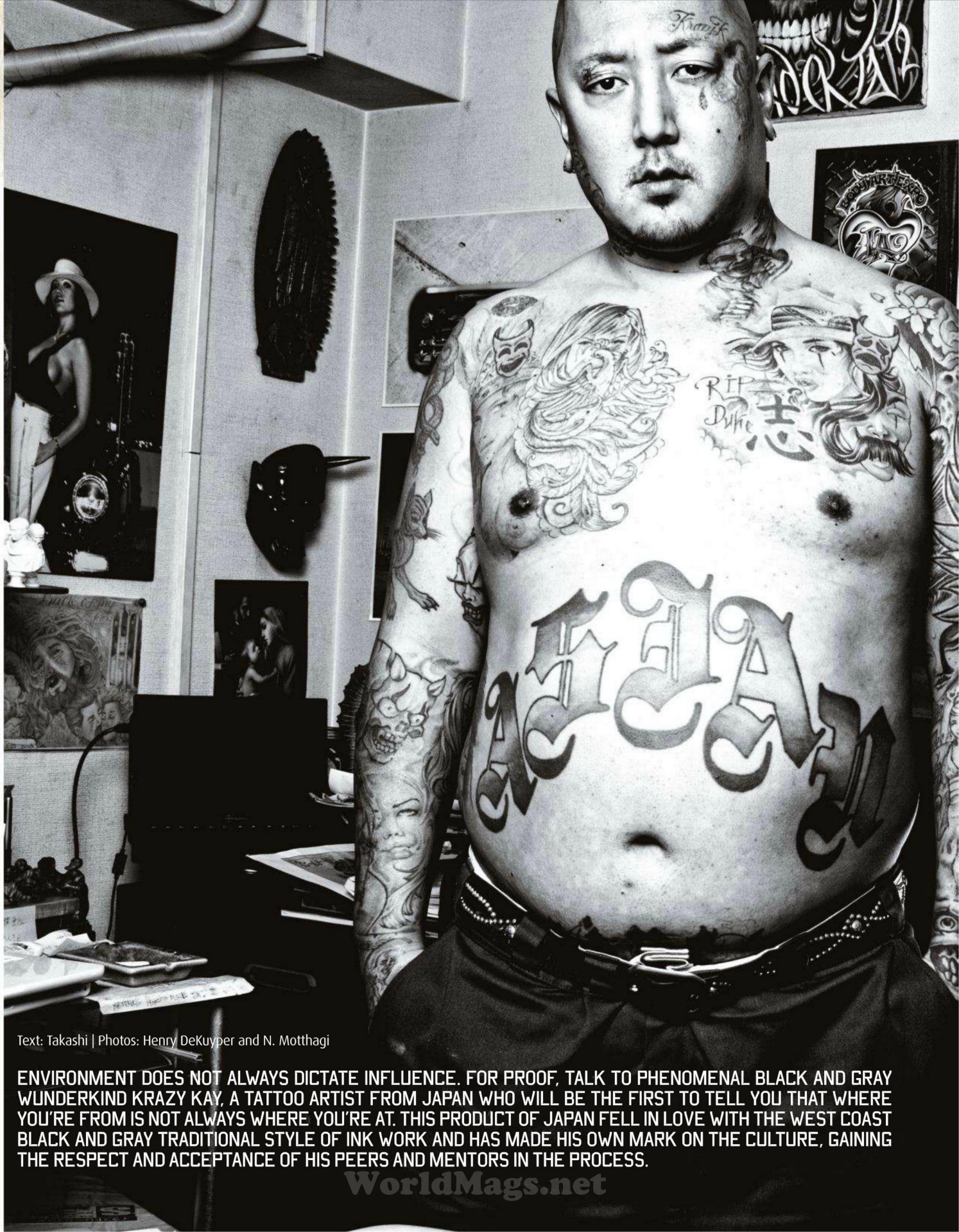


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KRAZY

K



Influence has long been the tool of inspiration for artists of all genres, mediums, and cultures. The tattoo culture is unique in the way that graffiti culture is in terms of the mobility of the art itself. As the trains that were painted traveled from town to town, the whole world saw them, and tattooing has that kind of power as well, which is why it has become such a worldwide phenomenon. The advent of the Internet has only furthered the reach of many tattoo

artists' works, and new-school artists have used this tool to hone their own style from the masters. Krazy Kay is not one of those artists, however. While it's true that he has been influenced by masters such as Pint, Jose Lopez, Mr. Cartoon, and Mark Mahoney, this Black and Gray prodigy is not new school; his reverence for the Chicano West Coast style of tattooing runs deep within his veins. He is the genuine article, having worked out of Lowrider Tattoo, Spotlight Tattoo, and A Town

tattoo on the West Coast, sharing his love for the culture that inspired him from almost 8,000 miles away. He is so respected by his peers that he was given the green light to open Lowrider Tattoo in Japan, and this product of Shizuoka is grateful for the acceptance and admiration of his peers. "I work really hard on my artwork," says the humble Kay. "To get support from guys I looked up to means a lot to me."

Born and raised in Shizuoka, Japan, Kay is thrilled to bring his style

of tattooing to the place that raised him, even though support for the art he loved was sometimes difficult to come by. "Japan had more of a focus on traditional-styled tattoos when I was growing up, so I faced a lot of skeptics when I became focused on other styles," Kay laments. Still, Kay has pressed on and has silenced his critics with tremendous skill and reverence for the art form he loves. He's earned honors including Best Black and Gray, and Best Back Piece at the Los

Angeles Tattoo Convention. Kay's Chicano style of tattooing has earned him respect as well as lots of clients in his native Japan, and his work as a sketch artist and oil painter is equally as incredible as his penchant for Black and Gray ink work. We sat down with the man himself to get a glimpse into what has made him one of the most sought after artists in the Black and Gray scene.

HOW WERE YOU INTRODUCED TO WEST COAST TATTOO CULTURE?

I first took notice of Mr. Cartoon's artwork (drawings, not tattoos) in a Japanese magazine back when I was 17 or 18 years old. I liked the style I saw because it was different than most of what I had seen growing up in Japan.

WHO ARE YOUR MAJOR INFLUENCES AS AN ARTIST?

Mr. Cartoon was the first influence I had, but from there I took notice of a few other guys. I got to know artists like Jose Lopez, Chuey Quintanar, Chente, Tommy Montoya,



Tim Hendricks after I started tattooing, and I got influence from them, too.


DID YOU APPRENTICE UNDER ANYONE?

Yes. I worked under Jose Lopez of Lowrider Tattoo. He taught me a lot, not only in technique but about the history of Black and Gray and Chicano styles of tattooing.

WHAT IS IT SPECIFICALLY ABOUT BLACK AND GRAY TATTOOS THAT MADE YOU WANT TO FOCUS ON THIS STYLE?







I don't know, really. I think just how it takes to the skin; the way it looks just captivates me for some reason. I've always been into it.

TELL ME ABOUT WINNING YOUR AWARDS AT THE LOS ANGELES TATTOO CONVENTION. WHAT DID YOU WIN?

I took home Second Place in Best Black and Gray Back Piece in 2007, and Second in Black and Gray Small Piece in 2009. In Japan, I won Second Place in Black and Gray at King of Tattoo in Tokyo in 2010, and I took First in 2011.

(Opposite and right): Great examples of Krazy Kay's commitment to the Black and Gray style of tattooing can be found on this sleeve. With an emphasis on clean lines and shading, Kay's realistic portrait style is top notch.



(Right): *The influence of West Coast Chicano style tattooing can be found on this intricate sleeve by Kay.*

(Opposite): *Back and chest pieces by Krazy Kay.*

HOW DID IT FEEL TO WIN THOSE AWARDS IN A PLACE THAT HAS SO MUCH INFLUENCE ON YOU?

I was so happy! I wasn't fully recognized as a "tattoo artist" in Japan, so I wanted to do well and get awards at the tattoo conventions to be officially recognized as a tattoo artist. It was big achievement for me. Those awards made me feel like I really became a tattoo artist, not just someone who tattoos for a living. I feel that I can now call myself a "tattoo artist" to the fullest extent.



"GETTING A TATTOO IN JAPAN MEANS MORE THAN JUST BEING A PAYING CUSTOMER. THERE IS MORE OF A RAPPORT THAT GETS BUILT. YOU HAVE TO SHOW RESPECT."

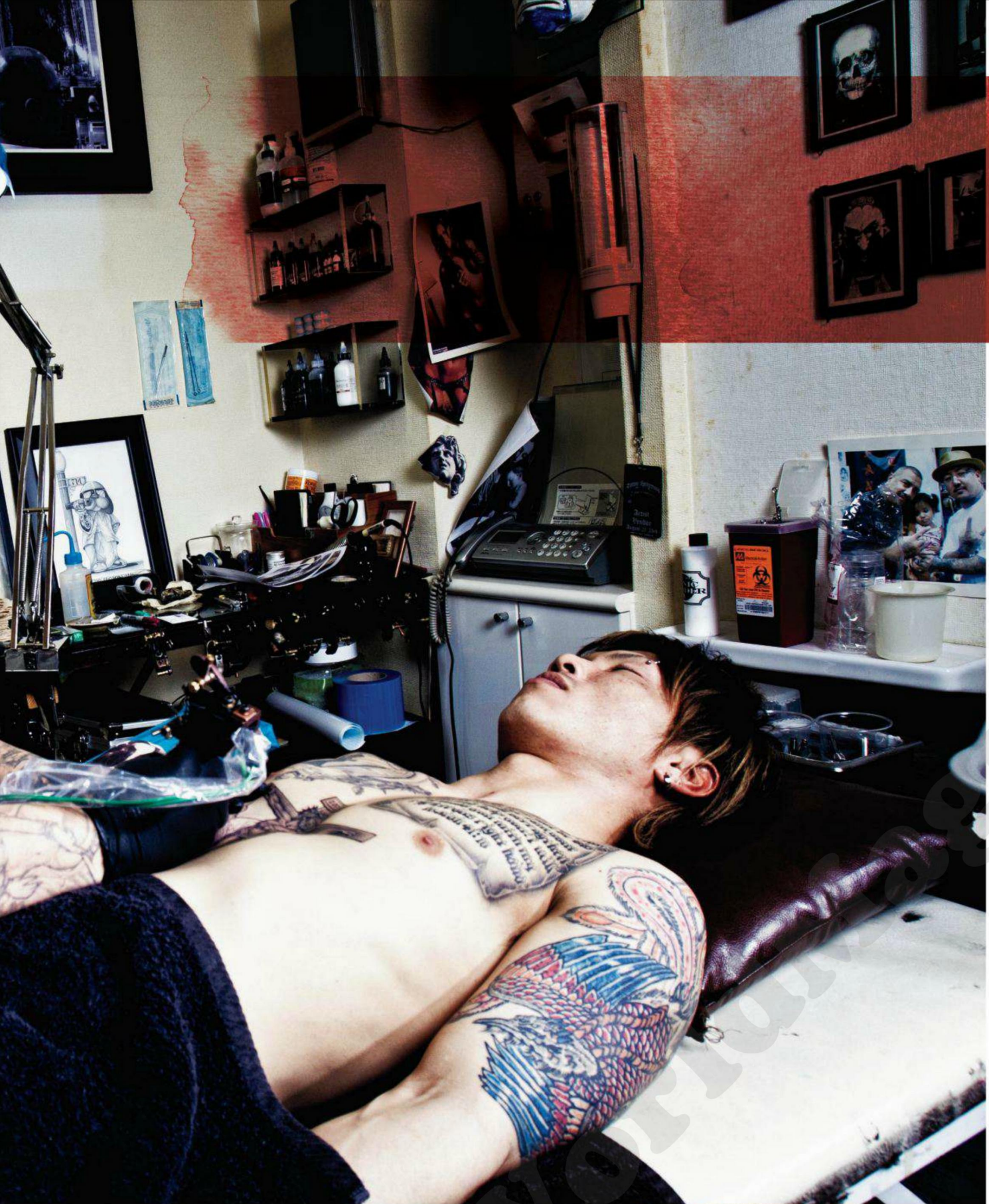
HOW DID THE JAPANESE TATTOO CULTURE REACT TO YOUR WORK?

Even though I gained my tattoo influence from the U.S. through American tattoo artists and tattooing in U.S., I still loved the mentality, spirit, and traditions of Japanese tattooing. Getting a tattoo in Japan means more than just being a paying customer. There is more of a rapport that gets built. You have to show respect to artists and communicate with them through conversations, sometimes gift giving, and truly work to gain a connection with the artist to get a tattoo, so it becomes more than just a paid work. The artist has their own feelings and mind-set in your tattoo as well. That said, as an artist, I was not initially respected in Japan.

WHY DO YOU THINK THEY WERE NOT SO WELCOMING TO YOU? WERE THEY PROUD OF YOU FOR BREAKING BOUNDARIES OR WERE THEY JUST NOT AS RECEPTIVE BECAUSE YOU CHOSE NOT TO FOCUS ON TRADITIONAL JAPANESE TATTOO STYLES?

I was hated by the Japanese tattoo industry because the Japanese tattoo industry has a traditional way that you have to follow in order to be a tattoo artist. You must become an apprentice to a tattoo master to learn.







It's kind of like joining their family in a sense. Since I started tattooing in the U.S., outside the Japan tattoo industry, I was considered an outsider because I had no proof of my work with a master. It upset me and I didn't like them either back then, but I understand it now, and I agree that kind of tradition is a good thing. One thing that helped was the fact that Mr. Horiyoshi III needed somebody in the Japanese tattoo culture to look after his son when he was in L.A., and he asked me to take care of him. In doing that, Horiyoshi III helped me to become more recognized in the Japanese tattoo industry.

YOU KEEP YOUR WATCH ON WEST COAST TIME EVEN IN JAPAN AND KEEP YOUR SCHEDULES THERE THE SAME WAY. WHY DO YOU DO THIS?

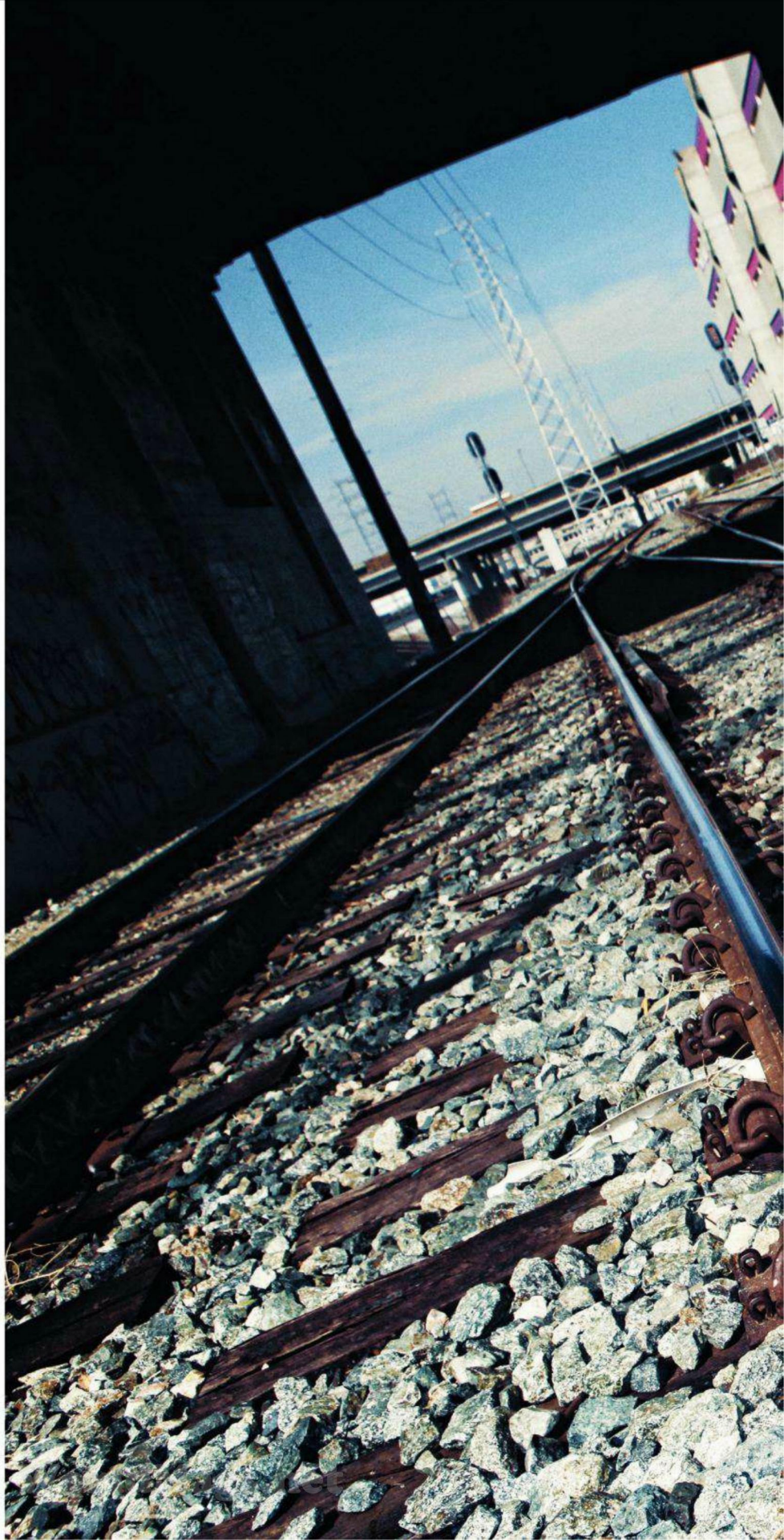
I keep my watch on West Coast time, but I have Japan and PST on my cellphone. That makes scheduling and talking with my friends and associates in L.A. easy.

YOU SPLIT TIME BETWEEN JAPAN AND THE U.S. WHEN TATTOOING. WHAT SHOPS ARE YOU WORKING OUT OF IN JAPAN AND WHAT SHOPS DO YOU WORK OUT OF IN LOS ANGELES?

In Japan, I work out of my private studio in Shizuoka and Spotlight Tattoo Tokyo in Tokyo. In the U.S., I work out of A Town Tattoo in Garden Grove, California, Electric Chair Tattoo in Fullerton, California, Under the Gun in Hollywood, and Secret Sidewalk in Hayward, California.

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO ACCOMPLISH THROUGH YOUR WORK IN YOUR CAREER?

I want to keep honing my craft and focusing to live out my dreams as an artist. Making a living doing something I love is a blessing for me, and to continue to do that, I need to challenge myself to keep learning different techniques. I don't have a big vision for my future; I just take it one day at a time and work hard every day. 





EXPO TATUAJE INTERNACIONAL

Location: Monterrey, Mexico

Photos: Nassim Mottaghi





The Show Devils

Text: Rich Coyle | Photos: Andy Hartmark
ShowDevils.com, TheEnigmaLive.com, SeranaRose.com

The Enigma and Serana Rose story is written like a movie screenplay about a modern-day rendition of Bonnie and Clyde sans the violent deaths and bank robbery. Picture this: A creative small-town girl and a larger-than-life sideshow performer leave in their wake a string of amazing and show-stopping performances that grab the attention of television and magazine headlines all over the country. The duo captures the imaginations and hearts of a mainstream audience as well a subculture with their legendary sideshow performance spree of these archetypal lovers. Meet the Show Devils.







Bonnie Parker was a woman whose life lacked excitement, but she got her chance when she met a charming and dashing young drifter named Clyde Barrow. Clyde had dreams of grandeur and aspirations to free himself of the Great Depression's hardships and struggle by way of a life of crime. The unlikely pair fell in love and began

robbing small banks in the Southwest with precision and panache, becoming celebrities known across the country along the way. To the law, the two were evil and sadistic bank robbers who deserved to be gunned down where they stood. Some people felt privileged and proud to have been held up by the infamous Bonnie and Clyde. To others, the duo was doing what nobody else had the guts to do.

The key phrase here is doing what nobody else had the guts to do. That phrase is paramount to a sideshow attraction and performer. Most are afraid of change, and some fear what they do not know. So let's meet the Show Devils.

These so-called sideshow freaks are called The World's Most Dangerous Touring Show for good reason. The tattooed Subculture Sweethearts

bring a menagerie of human marvels, body manipulations, and jaw-dropping stunts to each of their awe-inspiring shows. This Grand Poobah of sideshows unveils the '20s glory of vaudeville coupled with an intense mix of traditional routines, modern performances, and eclectic music. There are two parts of this dynamic duo aptly named the Show Devils. The female half of this working act is the

beautiful Serana Rose aka The Electric Girl, whose plethora of talents includes neon and glass swallowing and electrocution, to name a few. The second piece of the puzzle (pun intended) is The Enigma. If you've never seen him perform, you've probably heard of him through numerous shows such as the *X-Files* or on TMZ, or perhaps you recognize him as the blue-puzzle tattooed guy who cofounded the







OUTFIT AND JEWELRY: BORN UGLY BY SERANA ROSE

world famous Lollapalooza Sideshow tour. Either way, The Enigma is just that. He's highly intelligent, and everything he does is by design, including sword swallowing, pushing a moving power drill up his nose, and the ingestion of various liquids, pumping them out of his stomach and swallowing them again. This couple is helping to reintroduce us to the amazing feats of the circus sideshow performance and what it should be. "I was 15 and stumbled upon a

book on sideshows and thought to myself, *Now here's a chance for real magic.* Where the other one is a sleight. It's a lie. It's a covered-up truth. I'm revealing the truth right before your eyes," says The Enigma, in a monotone but enthusiastic voice. That's the essence and purity of his show. No trickery or illusions. What you see is what you get, and as Serana Rose says, "We're the George and Gracie of sideshow—a romantic tragedy."

HOW DID YOU COME UP WITH THE NAME THE ENIGMA?

Enigma is a common word in the English dictionary derived from the ancient Greek, and the definition is a puzzle. With that idea of being puzzled up, I thought it would be great to have a cool name to go along with the look.

YOU'RE OBVIOUSLY MUSICALLY TALENTED. WHERE DID YOU STUDY AND HONE YOUR SKILLS?

My mom wanted to be a music teacher, and her father wouldn't let her, so of course having children, my brother and I ended up with lots of private lessons. Most of my childhood was back and forth in the back seat of a car from lessons and living off of casseroles and comic books as it were. I've had flute and piano lessons from 6 up until high school. I played keyboard in the show in the '90s and switched to guitar and played a number of years.

YOU'RE A ONE-MAN BAND. DO YOU HAVE A PARTICULAR INSTRUMENT YOU FAVOR?

I've played so many, I don't have a particular favorite. But, I noticed that there was another instrument that didn't require electricity and had a built-in amplifier and is essentially just a bell. The trumpet. What do you know? So lightweight! So flexible! You could play it out of nowhere and still be heard. The trumpet is my

passion now. I will make a movie and call it *Passion of the Trumpet* (laughs).

HOW DID YOU GET INTO SIDESHOW AND PERFORMING?

This was all in Bothell, the suburbs of Seattle. I went to school and was exchanging dreams of boundless grandeur for realities. I led such a creative childhood and joined a magic club at about 15 and stumbled upon a book on sideshows.



"THE SCARS I HAVE ARE DONE IN A WAY THAT LOOKED LIKE SOMETHING DID HAPPEN. THEY WERE ALL DONE BY DESIGN, AND I THINK IT ADDS MORE DEPTH TO MY CHARACTER."

Now here's a chance for real magic.

THAT BOOK SEEMED TO BE THE TURNING POINT FOR YOU. HOW DID IT PIQUE YOUR INTEREST?

I decided that here is real magic because when people believe one thing and you show them another, the truth appears as magic. Where the other one is a sleight. It's a lie. It's a covered-up truth. I'm revealing the truth right before your eyes. Kind of like Penn and Teller and how they sometimes reveal the secret and then they perform it again in a different way. This isn't stacking a deck of cards or something previously laid out. This is something you take action and do. It was very appealing.

NOW THAT YOU KNEW WHAT YOU WANTED TO DO, HOW DID HONE YOUR CRAFT?

Well, I read about it and had very little knowledge (laughs). So, I did it, like swallow swords and pounding spikes into my skull, breathing fire . . . things like that.

HOLD ON. YOU WERE DOING ALL OF THIS AT 15?

Not so much performing at 15, but just doing the art. It's sideshow. In a magic show you wonder, "How is it done?" In a sideshow, you wonder, "Why is it





done?" For instance, sword swallowing is a basic thing. You take a sword and swallow it. I don't understand what more you would need to know. It's not like some secret knowledge of the ancients. You just do it. How does he get so tan? Well, he sits out in the sun. These are body modifications that people do to themselves all the time, and people don't think twice, but you swallow a sword, it's like, "Oh no what's he doing there?" There is a remarkable amount of risk involved comparatively.

HOW DO YOUR PARENTS FEEL ABOUT YOUR CAREER PATH AND PASSION?

Well, you know moms. It's not like I was working out in my bedroom to become a football star. I'm doing physical gymnastics that are not the typical norm. She's still not happy about it. You know, nothing's well enough for her son. You could be president of the United States and she could call up and ask if you're eating your greens! That's where we're at now.

WHEN DID YOU GET YOUR FIRST TATTOO AND WHAT WAS IT OF?

My friend had just got a tattoo and I thought it would be cool and didn't know what to get so he said, "You should get your own art." So I stayed up and drew my manly tattoo in '89. It was a little stick figure skeleton guy and I thought, *Shoot, I could have gotten a much bigger tattoo.*

WAS THAT THE BEGINNING OF YOUR PHYSICAL TRANSFORMATION?

In 1991, I ended up having social relations with that Lollapalooza Sideshow, which I cofounded. I was really pushing my art and coming up with more and more acts, and I thought to myself, *Wouldn't it*

be cool to be a different color? How would I do that? Maybe have special lights on me all the time? Nah . . . the lighting rigs change all the time. What if I painted myself? Nah . . . it's gooey and messy. Wait a minute. What if I tattooed my body a different color? Now I'd pay to see that! People have great ideas all day long; it's just the matter of the force you put behind each idea.

YOUR BODY IS CLEARLY ADORNED WITH INK. HOW LONG DID THIS WHOLE PROCESS TAKE?

So, I talked to some tattoo artists and they just laughed at me. I talked to one and he said, "It will be all splotchy if it's all one color." I told him, "Well, I have this design of jigsaw puzzles and let's just fill it in piece by piece." Nonetheless, I ended up calling Spaulding and Rogers tattoo supply and asking how much ink I should order to cover up my body to which they replied and said, "We don't know. Call us up when you find out." So, I ended up finding somebody on tour in 1992 and then in January of 1993, we finished all the lines. Over 250 artists have worked on me from everywhere on earth from South Africa to Switzerland.

YOU'RE OBVIOUSLY TALENTED AND EXTREMELY CREATIVE. FROM WHERE DO YOU DRAW YOUR INSPIRATION?

My inspiration is drawn from Disney films back in the day like, *Now You See Him, Now You Don't*. Dexter could make himself invisible and concoct potions that made you really smart or really strong. So that and spending my childhood in the back seat of a car with comic books. Stan Lee is kind of like my stepdad (laughs).

YOU'VE BEEN AROUND THE WORLD PERFORMING. WHAT HAS THE ENIGMA BEEN UP TO AS OF LATE?

My full-time gig is the sideshow now. Ever since I left the tour, I haven't looked back. Our act is called The Show Devils featuring myself with Serana Rose, whom I've been performing with for over five years. We're like the George and Gracie of sideshow.

ASIDE FROM YOUR HORN IMPLANTS, DO YOU HAVE ANY OTHER BODY MODIFICATIONS THAT ARE WAY OUT THERE?

I was going to split my tongue, but I figured it's been done. Well, my eyeballs are tattooed.

WAIT. YOU TATTOOED YOUR EYEBALLS?

I did. It entailed a week of blindness, a month of agony, and now it's just everyday discomfort. Hey man, if you don't jump off the cliff, everyone will meet you there.

I'M SURE YOU HAVE EXPERIENCED PEOPLE LOOKING AT YOU SIDEWAYS, BUT HAVE YOU EVER ENCOUNTERED EXTREME DISCRIMINATION OR IGNORANCE BECAUSE OF YOUR LOOK?

Absolutely. I believe it was somewhere in Europe. There was a whole group of youngsters like in their late teens or early twenties, and it was while I was with the Lollapalooza Sideshow. They were just jeering and gawking and saying things like, "Look at that guy! What the hell?!" So on and so forth and toward the back of the crowd, people were like, "Oh my goodness! That dude was in the *X-Files*! He's really famous!" By the time I got past the entire crowd, the whole crowd changed its mind about me. I went from disgusting

and weird to oh my goodness he's a famous movie star. From a scorn or scowl to idolization.

DO YOU HAVE ANY REGRETS?

No regrets. I do everything based upon the best justification I can. As we all go through life, we have to make the best decisions we can. Now, if you had a chance to do it over again, it'll just mean you'll be as ignorant as you were the first time. Now, if I had all that knowledge and do it all over again, I would have tattooed by body at 16, you know. That's that.

DOES THE ENIGMA HAVE PARTING WORDS OF WISDOM TO SHARE?

The talent is music, the gimmick is sideshow, and the blue skin and horns is just the flourish. So, if you look past the flourish and the gimmick, then you'll see the talent.

THANKS FOR THE CHAT. LET ME INTRODUCE YOU TO MY COUNTERPART, SERANA ROSE.

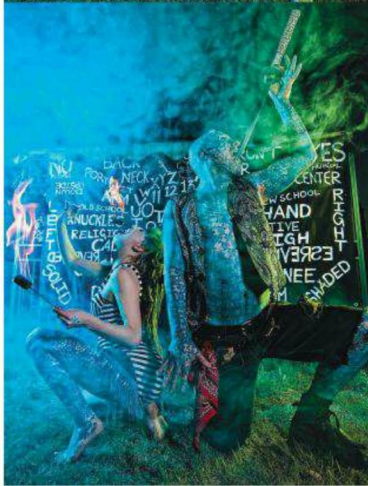
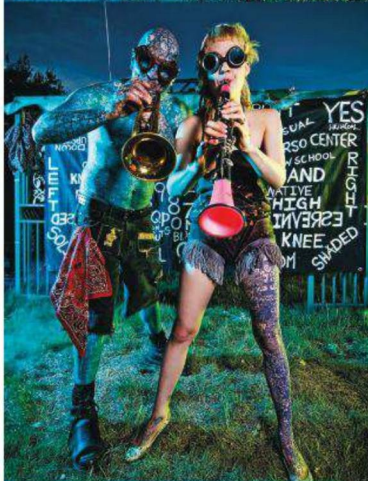
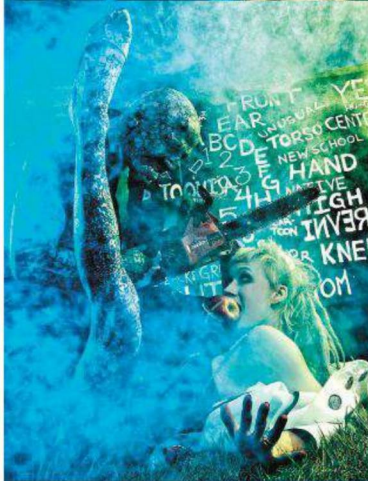
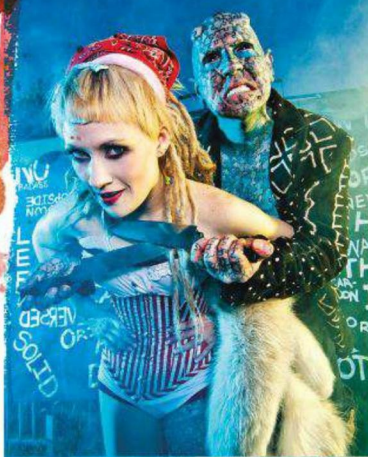
Hello, I'm Serana Rose and I am the female half of the show.

NICE TO MEET YOU SERANA. HOW DID YOU AND THE ENIGMA MEET?

While The Enigma was on tour, I was in fashion school, and we met during a convention. I was so amazed at the show when he was performing solo at the time, and I went up to him and said, "I would love to do your costuming." After that, I made vests and started playing bass guitar behind his show. I tried to figure a way to travel with him, and the only way that was possible was to play music with him. So, I hurried up and learned all the songs he was playing and started learning stunts from there. That was five years ago.



OUTFIT: DEXTER BY NISIAN LOO



"I DECIDED THAT HERE IS REAL MAGIC BECAUSE WHEN PEOPLE BELIEVE ONE THING AND YOU SHOW THEM ANOTHER, THE TRUTH APPEARS AS MAGIC. WHERE THE OTHER ONE IS A SLEIGHT. IT'S A LIE. IT'S A COVERED-UP TRUTH. I'M REVEALING THE TRUTH RIGHT BEFORE YOUR EYES."

YOU'RE ALSO A FASHION DESIGNER BY TRADE. HOW DOES THAT WORK BEING ON TOUR CONSTANTLY?

It works great because I was designing unusual fashion and doing what I loved at the same time. I loved bizarre and crazy fashion, and now I get to exploit that in a freak show.

WERE YOU ALWAYS THIS CREATIVE?

My mother is a fiber artist, and she was the one who taught me how to sew. From a very young age, I was making clothes for my dolls and I was really into art. I lived out in the country in Iowa, so that's where I got all my art instinct from. And I traveled with my mom to art fairs all the time selling her artwork.

HOW DOES YOUR MOTHER FEEL ABOUT YOUR FASHION CAREER?

My mom is very supportive of my career. She loves that I'm out here in L.A. doing art and traveling and seeing the world because she never got to do that. As a matter of fact, she actually manages our website and was our booking agent for a spell.

WHERE DO YOU DRAW YOUR INSPIRATION FROM IN TERMS OF YOUR FASHION LINE?

My line is called Born Ugli. Fashion is definitely my outlet, and I draw a lot of

inspiration from when I travel and see the world and various cultures. I try to put all of that gypsy vibe into my style. If I stay in place too long, I run out of ideas. So I have to keep moving.

YOU HAVE SOME NICE INK WORK DONE. WHEN DID YOU FIRST GET TATTOOED AND WHAT WAS IT OF?

Before I had any tattoos, I actually worked at a tattoo shop in Iowa. I got my first tattoo of the Pin Cushion Queen from Tim Burton's *Children's Book*. After that, I hooked up with Enigma and wanted him to do a puzzle piece on me. He's done the majority of my leg stocking.

COMING FROM A SMALL TOWN, HOW DID YOUR PARENTS REACT TO YOUR TATTOOS?

Tattoos didn't bother my parents as much as the scarification and the sight of me putting a chainsaw up to my face.

CONSIDERING THAT YOU'RE PLACED IN HARM'S WAY EVERY PERFORMANCE, HOW DO YOUR PARENTS HANDLE THE SHOW?

They're a little more used to it now and know I'm not crazy. Just a little. I don't know if they love it, but you know. In fact, my dad borrowed a chainsaw from my neighbors for us to use on stage. He'll go out and get power tools whenever we do shows in the Midwest (laughs).



ASIDE FROM YOUR CREATIVE FASHION SENSE, DID YOU ALWAYS WANT TO BE A PERFORMER?

When I was 15 I loved performing so much that I even started a venue in my barn where I would book bands and play. It started off in music for me, but I realized that I'm into visual art more than music. Being on stage is very empowering to me, and I love to show off my talents. It's like a power exchange. It wouldn't be the same doing what I'm doing without an audience. You feed off people's energy. It's especially important when you're risking your life and your health. It's a big turn on to me.

TELL ME A LITTLE ABOUT YOUR SCARIFICATION

The scars I have are done in a way that looked like something did happen. They were all done by design, and I think it adds more depth to my character. For instance the scars across my shoulder look like I got electrocuted or struck by lightning, and as a matter of fact, I get electrocuted at the end of every show (laughs). I get hit with about 500,000 volts off a lightning generator and can light bulbs with my fingertips.

OK, THAT SIGHT ALONE MUST BE JAW DROPPING TO THE AUDIENCE. YOU MUST GET A KICK OUT OF THEIR REACTION?

Love seeing their faces. That's where I get my excitement. We all feed off each other. I'm a natural people pleaser.

WHAT WOULD YOU SAY IS THE MOST DANGEROUS STUNT YOU'VE PERFORMED?

Socially everything is pretty dangerous. If the chain on the chainsaw broke, I'd have a smile for a mile. Glass eating is pretty bad



OUTFIT: DEETZ BY WISHA LOO

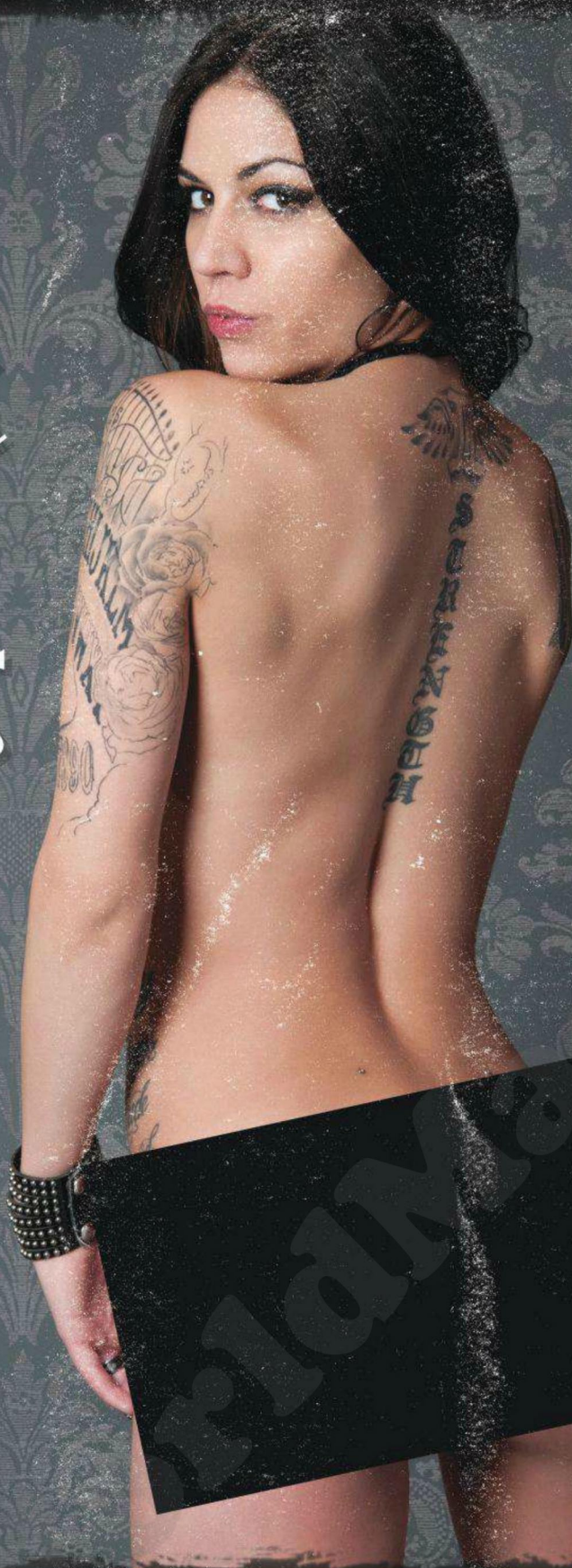
if i
can't have
badcock
i'd rather have
nothing
at all



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"AS WE ALL GO THROUGH LIFE, WE HAVE TO MAKE THE BEST DECISIONS WE CAN. NOW, IF YOU HAD A CHANCE TO DO IT OVER AGAIN, IT'LL JUST MEAN YOU'LL BE AS IGNORANT AS YOU WERE THE FIRST TIME."

on your internal organs; the fuel used for the fire is pretty bad because of cancer-causing ingredients. I mean I can trip and fall on stage, hit my head, and die


HOW LONG DO YOU PLAN ON PERFORMING STUNTS?

I'll probably do this until I die. I don't have another plan, and everything has gone so great I cannot see a reason to stop.

WHAT'S IN THE FUTURE FOR SERANA ROSE?

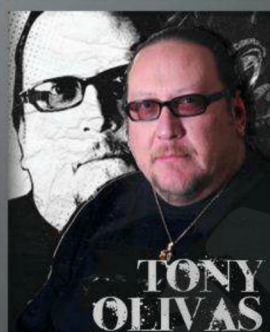
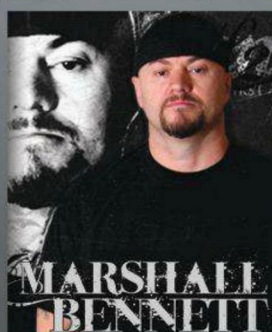
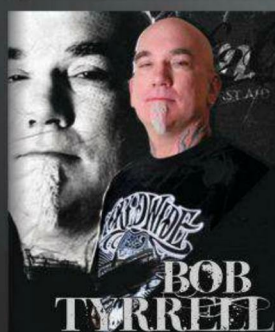
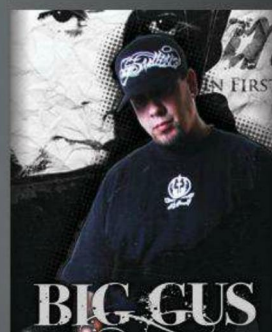
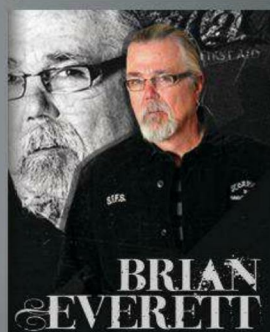
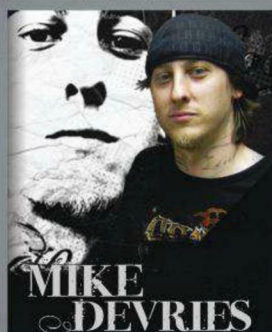
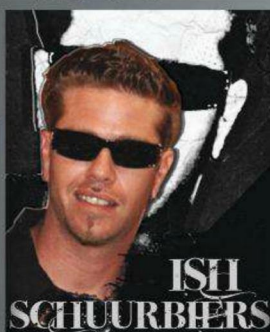
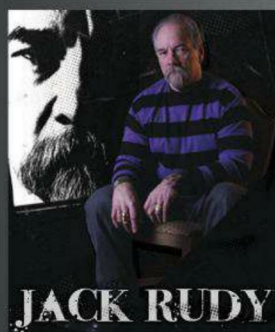
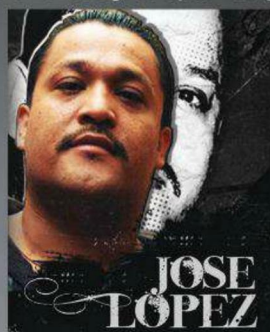
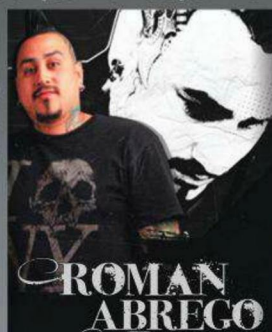
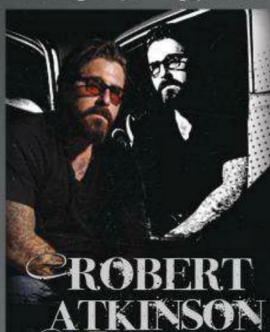
I want to get more exposure and to expand my fashion line. I'll continue to perform as long as my body can handle it. I'll continue to shove things into it (laughs). And be better at clarinet.

TELL US SOMETHING THAT EVEN YOUR FANS DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOU.

My arms and face are covered in tattoos and you can only see them under a black light! I love Paris Hilton. She's got great fashion sense and music taste and she's a princess everywhere she goes. I'm also a chicken hypnotist, and lastly, I can milk cows and goats from living on a farm. 

ARE YOU AFTERCARELESS? THEY AREN'T!

Aftercareless: /'after-ke(ə)erlis/ (adj.) 1. neglecting or taking insufficient care of your skin after getting a new tattoo, piercing or body modification. 2. not having high quality aftercare available for your clients in your tattoo or piercing studio. 3. sending a customer to another location to purchase aftercare. 4. listening to friends' aftercare regiments over the professional that completed the artwork on you. 5. recommending or putting products on your new body art that are not designed specifically for them.



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Pressure makes diamonds, which is the case for Fanny Maurer. She's an accomplished makeup artist in a high-pressure environment for some of the fashion industry's elite. If the encumbrance of being a makeup artisan wasn't enough, she moonlights as a highly sought after alternative model at the same spell. Meet Fanny Maurer aka Lady Diamond.

Text: Rich Coyle | Photos: Andy Hartmark
FannyMaurer.com



"I ACTUALLY GOT MY TATTOOS BEFORE I BECAME A MODEL, SO THERE IS NO CORRELATION BETWEEN THE TWO. I DIDN'T PLAN ON BEING A MODEL, I JUST GOT ASKED."

Life is a balancing act. It's like love and hate—same emotion different weight. There's a certain equilibrium and balance necessary for anything to function harmoniously, whether it's life, love, or jobs. For instance, some people have the uncanny ability to toggle between careers and do so with great success. Being successful at one craft is a task in itself, but imagine being equally proficient at two. It leaves you with the option—and dilemma—of concentrating on one or juggling a few, but in the end, there has to be a sacrifice of some sort.

Here is the quintessential example of a woman who is bonded between two professions and executing them both flawlessly. Fanny Maurer is a beautiful alt model and makeup artist from Paris, leveraging both acts with perfect balance. This is just the start of path well chosen, and as an accomplished makeup artist that showcases her works on high-end runways and catwalks, she also doubles as a model for those very same catwalks. It's a high speed, low-drag occupation, but she puts it away with sheer grace. "One day I was doing the makeup for this photographer, and





HAIR AND MAKEUP: VICIOUS VAL

he asked me if I wanted to model. I did, and that was six years ago," Fanny says, and she hasn't looked back. With a classic look and timeless appeal, Fanny Maurer has definitely taken the alternative-modeling scene by storm, and there's nothing slowing her down. This model and makeup artist is constantly on the move and in demand for work, whether it's photo ops *doing* the makeup for the talent, or participating herself and *being* the main focus. Fanny is definitely one of a kind in

a have-your-cake-and-eat-it-too kind of way. While she's not necessarily a jet-setter by definition, she certainly racks up the frequent flier miles, and we were able to track her down. So with the 10 minutes we were given, we figured an even exchange that resulted in an interview we called 10 questions in 10 minutes.

AFTER DOING OUR DUE DILIGENCE, WE KNOW YOU'RE A PRETTY SOUGHT-AFTER ALT MODEL AND MAKEUP ARTISAN. HOW DID YOU GET STARTED IN THE INDUSTRY?

I was working as a makeup artist for a photographer, and he asked me to get in front of the camera and we shot. That was six years ago. That's how I started. It was unexpected. I got started in makeup because when I was younger, I knew I loved makeup and all things that were *girly*. I was modeling for a few years and really not doing anything else, so I started really focusing on makeup and the aesthetics and here I am!

ME BEING A GUY, I'M CLEARLY NOT WELL VERSED

IN MAKEUP OTHER THAN THAT I SEE IT DONE AT PHOTO SHOOTS. IS THERE A SPECIFIC TYPE OF MAKEUP YOU SPECIALIZE IN?

I don't think many guys are that well versed in makeup, although you'd be surprised. I actually do the makeup for a lot of high-end photo shoots and catwalk shows. It's stressful yet I love doing it and can't picture myself doing anything else. I work on some pretty high-end clientele.

YOU MENTIONED EARLIER THAT YOU GREW UP A

GIRLY TYPE OF GIRL. HOW DID YOUR PARENTS REACT TO THEIR DAUGHTER GETTING TATTOOED?

At first, they weren't too happy about it. They absolutely did not want me to get my tattoos, but as long as I could work and get jobs, they were OK with it. I definitely want more work done, like my neck, throat, back, and sleeve. But my face is something I'll never touch.

DID YOU GET YOUR TATTOOS BEFORE OR AFTER BECOMING A MODEL?

I actually got my tattoos *before* I became a model so, there is no correlation between the two. I didn't plan on actually being a model, I just got asked and things just took off from there. I was at the right place at the right time. It wasn't like I planned this out and everything that's happened up until now. I just have been going with it and I've been blessed.

YOU'RE OBVIOUSLY WELL TRAVELED. DID YOU GET ALL YOUR ARTWORK DOMESTICALLY OR THROUGHOUT YOUR TRAVELS OVER THE GLOBE?



**"I'VE BEEN FORTUNATE
IN THE SENSE THAT MY
JOB ALLOWS ME TO
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FREELY. I HAVE MANY
FRIENDS WHO HAVE
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HAVING A DIFFICULT
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HAIR AND MAKEUP: VICIOUS VAL

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chronicles the true essence of the art which revolves around the centrifugal force behind the tattoo lifestyle. We travel the globe to share stories, art and passion for the craft which has us all bound by ink.



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HAIR AND MAKEUP: VICIOUS VAL

I was 22 when I got my first tattoo in my left inner arm of some girly stuff like stars and scrolls. I've had so many different artists I worked with from all over the globe from Austria, America, France, Germany, and Canada, etc. Pretty much all over the world.

YOU'VE CERTAINLY BEEN AROUND THE BODY ART SCENE FOR A WHILE. DO YOU HAVE ANY SPECIFIC ARTISTS WHOM YOU WANT TO GET WORK BY?

I really like Jack Ribeiro's style. He's from France. I really want work from Joe Capobiano from California. He's amazing as well. There are just so many talented artists out there. I wish I had more real estate to get work done from all the people I admire. There are just so many.

TODAY'S CULTURE SEEMS TO BE MORE ACCEPTING OF TATTOOED INDIVIDUALS AND IT IS NOT AS TABOO. DO YOU THINK BEING

TATTOOED STILL HOLDS A NEGATIVE STIGMA?

It has, of course, but I've been fortunate in the sense that my job allows me to display my tattoos freely. I have many friends who have tattoos and are having a difficult time finding jobs. I've been lucky career-wise, but on the streets, it sometimes has a negative connotation. Some people can be really rude and vile to me. They stare incessantly.

WHERE IN EUROPE DO YOU CURRENTLY RESIDE AND HOW DO THEY TREAT YOU BEING A TATTOOED FEMALE?

I live in Paris, France, now, and the tattoo culture here is actually quite big, but there are not too many people that walk around the streets openly with tattoos. Make no mistake, it's a big culture, just more underground.

HOW WOULD YOU SAY

THE ALT MODELING SCENE IS IN PARIS?

The scene is getting bigger and bigger. I think more women are getting the recognition that they deserve. It's still not fully mainstream, so there is a sense of people who aren't as open minded and snobbish. You really have to watch who you work with, just as any model would. It's a fairly new scene, so people tend to take advantage.

LASTLY, WHAT DOES FANNY MAURER HAVE PLANNED OR IS GOING TO BE DOING IN THE NEXT FIVE YEARS?

Five years from now, I want to be one of the best makeup artists in the world. It's truly my passion and something I pride myself in. I really want to take this to the next level. 

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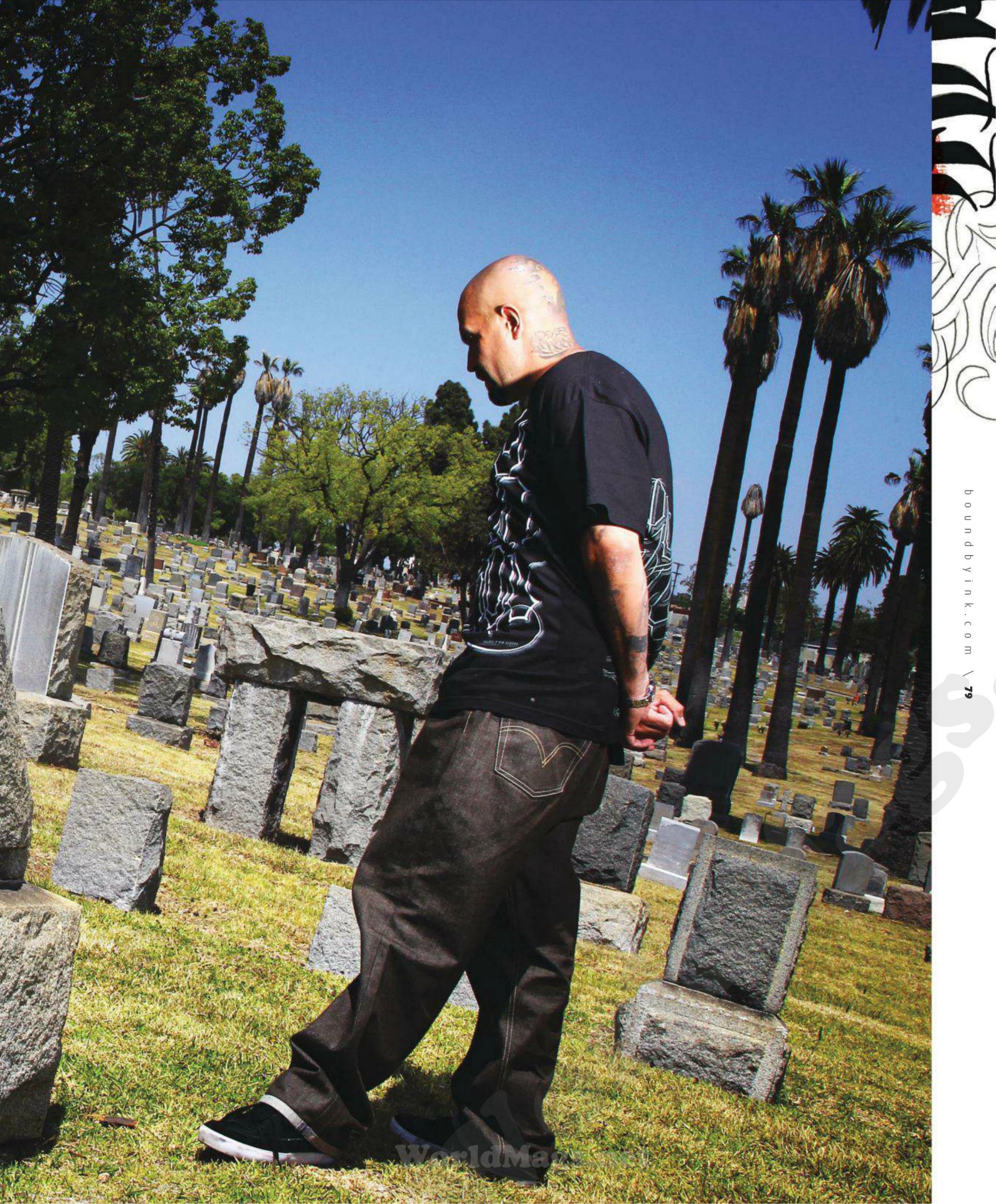
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Letters to Live by

In a world where opportunities do not exist, artistic expression will abound. Just ask Los Angeles tattooist and artist Big Sleeps.

The streets that influenced his artwork nearly swallowed him whole, but today this incredibly talented artist is utilizing his incredible gift to spread the almost extinct art of his childhood on a worldwide level.

Text: Mike Ianders | Photos: Henry DeKuyper
LettersToLiveBy.com



"YOU SEE PEOPLE GLAMORIZING THE DRESS AND CERTAIN PARTS OF THE STREET LIFESTYLE, BUT THERE'S NO WAY THEY WOULD DO THAT IF THEY FELT THE PAIN OF LOSING PEOPLE OR BEING LOCKED UP. I UNDERSTAND THEY JUST TAKE ASPECTS OF IT, BUT IT'S NOT A LIFESTYLE THEY WOULD ULTIMATELY WANT TO LIVE, THAT'S FOR SURE."

(Above) The loss of Sleeps' mother has been a profound influence on his hustle. He channels his experiences with her into pushing himself to be the best artist he can be.

(Opposite) Examples of Big Sleeps' daily sketches. He dedicates himself to letter development on a daily basis, seeking to create new styles.

The language of the streets is an ever-evolving dialogue bound by the codes of survival. In urban Los Angeles, it is called the placa, and it is written on walls, park benches, bus stops, and fences. It is self-expression in the most territorial sense. "I may not have much, but I have this block. It's all I've got." The words and letters of the placa painted by urban artisans speak volumes 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. If the pen is truly mightier than the sword, the spray of an aerosol paint can in this lexicon is a cannon—able to leave behind no uncertain terms or ambiguity regarding the topic at hand. While these ornate words are indeed powerful, the letters themselves have even more significance in

the districts of Los Angeles, where renowned artist and tattooist Big Sleeps was raised. These letters carry a style all their own, with fonts and styles curated from concrete calligraphers, many of whom never survived the rough canvas they painted on. It is fate, then, that the letters that once served to remind Big Sleeps where he was trapped serve now as worldwide passport stamps to take him where he is going—a journey far removed from the haunting memorial murals that adorned the walls of his inner-city struggle.

As a tattoo artist who has done stints at Lowrider Tattoos, Will Rise Tattoo, and Modern Ink, Sleeps has begun traveling vigorously to spread his art in conventions both domestic and abroad. He's done design

collaborations with a slew of well-respected artists and companies including Sullen, OG Abel, Boog, Norm, Slick, and Dissizit. His third book, *Neighborhood Offerings*, a joint documentation of placa street styles Sleeps put together with his mentor and street legend, Prime, has even been picked up at the Getty Research Institute, where it sits alongside hieroglyphics and ancient parchment scrolls in a further exploration of mankind's intrinsic need to express itself. His Big Sleeps T-shirts are made by a company he works with called Second Chance, which gives 30 percent of its profits to Homeboy Industries, a company that employs those from the neighborhoods who were not as lucky as he was when it came to receiving positive opportunities.

Sleeps also prints his shirts through the company, helping to further put food on the tables of those who came from similar or identical circumstances as his own Los Angeles upbringing. In addition, Big Sleeps teaches kids about art through community outreach, utilizing his gift for art to put those who are in the shoes he was once in on a better path, as opposed to following in the wayward footsteps that got him incarcerated and nearly cost him his life. "I know there are a lot of little homies that look up to me and want to talk more about following my mistakes, and I try to set them on a different path instead," says the acclaimed scribe. "To have the kind of opportunities I have now is a dream come true. I could never dream that my art would one day take me to so many places



Could Great One The Serenita

This style I've been messing around with for a while.



I call it street traditional. I'm taking my street style & mixing it up a bit with traditional style lettering.

Here on the love & hate I even added a little bit of script style all around it to make it more appealing.



Figure 1



This is a my version of lower case Old English.

Figure 2

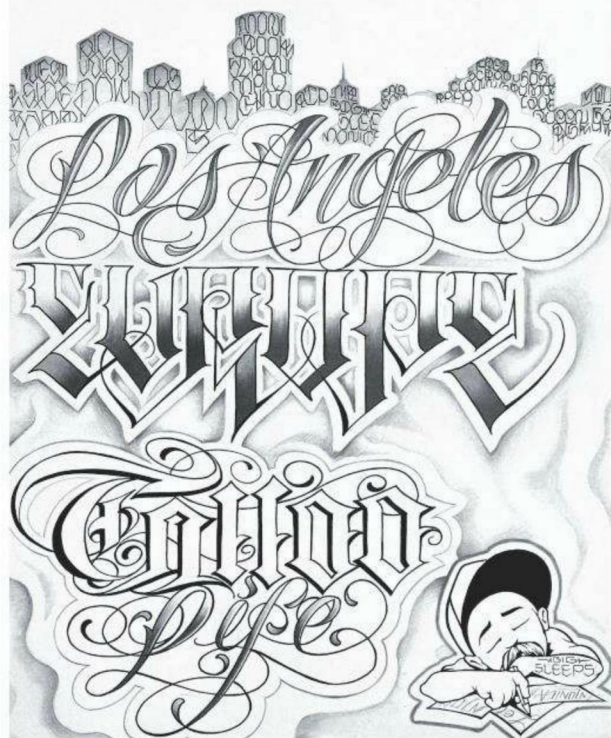
Figure 2 is the exact same font. The grey area just shows how you can enhance the letters, so they take on a totally different look.



Figure 3



Same with Figure 3, but you can use a script style at the bottom to give it more appeal.

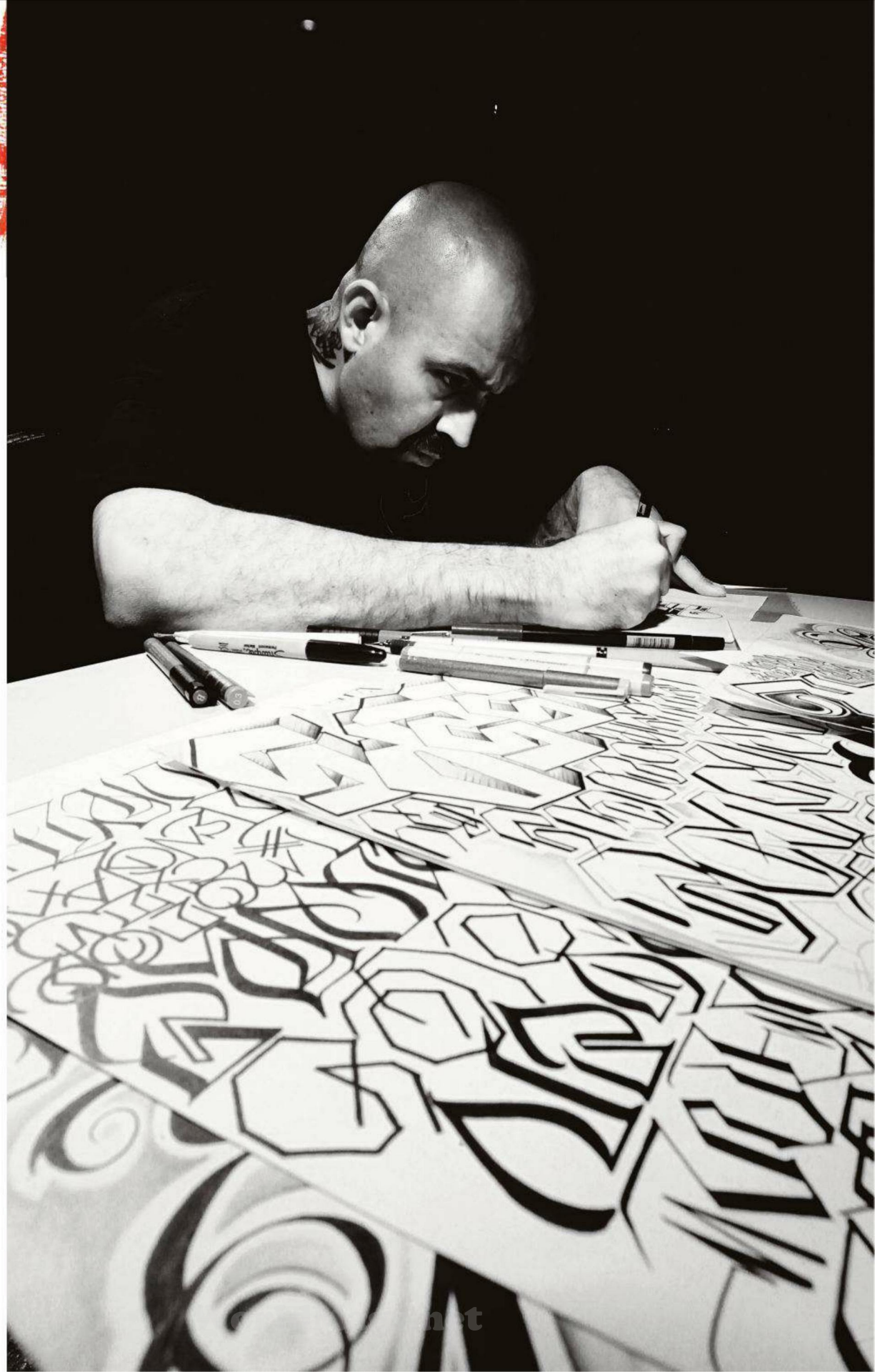


and I'd end up meeting so many people because of it." Sleeps' words are genuine and sincere, and his appreciation for a second chance at life is bittersweet, as he lost his mother to cancer before she could see him spread his wings. "There were so many times in life when I hurt her and let her down," he says dejectedly, "But my wife, my kids, and my family and friends keep me going by pushing me and letting me know that she would be proud of me."

For all the change that has taken place in Big Sleeps' turbulent life, it has been his art that has remained his one true constant. "I love lettering so much. There's so much discipline involved in it," he says with the enthusiasm of a child. "There are so many styles out there, and it's crazy to be going to places like Copenhagen, Denmark and having people ask me to do tattoos with original L.A. lettering styles from my book. I'm like, 'Don't you want some fancy script instead?'" While his newfound traveling can be all at once intimidating and humbling, Sleeps is pushing himself as hard as he can to continue spreading and documenting the placa tradition that has made him into the artist he is today. It is certainly poetic justice that a man who once saw the alleys of his neighborhood as his only artistic refuge now sees the entire world as his canvas. Let's just hope the world is ready, because I can tell you one thing: Big Sleeps will never run out of styles.

WHAT INFLUENCED YOU TO BECOME A TATTOO ARTIST?

My influences run deep. It's funny because I just touched the mainstream tattoo world, I had no clue who was doing what. Of course, I've seen



"I HAD FAITH AND TRIALS IN MY LIFE, AND DURING THE HIGHEST POINT OF STRESS, I SAW MY MOM'S PICTURE ON THE WALL AND KNEW IT WAS TIME FOR ME TO CHANGE."

(Opposite left) Big Sleeps in deep concentration.

(Right) More examples of the many styles and fonts Big Sleeps uses in his tattoos and original pieces. His art can also be found at The Getty.

magazines but I never paid close attention to it because I never knew I could be here. I've been drawing, tattooing, and writing on walls my whole life. My influences came from the stuff I saw growing up. I think my whole life was an influence in a way. Seeing everything around me on walls, fences, and buildings just walking to school, it just motivated me to try to make my art. I find beauty in different shit. I think '88 or '89 might have been the first time I ever did a tattoo. My friend and I couldn't figure out how to do it right, and I just kept practicing on certain homies. They used to beg me to do tats on them, and I had that lettering. Prime was the first person to put a professional machine in my hand, and he told me about different needles and stuff. I never got the chance to get a formal apprenticeship, but I feel like it came instead from the way I grew up.

WHAT CAPTIVATED YOU ABOUT LETTERING IN PARTICULAR?

I think just how different it all was and how much discipline it took to get good. Every gang had a different style of writing with slight variations, and you could distinguish it right away if you lived there. It bred competition and made you want to outdo other people's styles. One of the main things that got me hooked was the merging of graffiti

styles and gang-inspired art. The graf artists changed it up and started adding crazy styles and my style has a mixture of both. You can see different curvature and script styles merging with the gang-style foundations, and that's what I tried to always build upon. I used to get competitive on walls, too.

A LOT OF PEOPLE DON'T REALIZE THE COORDINATION IT TAKES TO DO ART UNDER THOSE KINDS OF ADVERSE CONDITIONS. HOW DID YOU DEVELOP YOUR COORDINATION?

When I was younger I would practice in the air. I would whip out all these styles with my finger and all the letters styles stuck in my head; it was like I was writing it on paper. They were some of the more refined styles I would use, and I swear that if you could translate it they would have been perfect, down to the pressure I used on my finger and everything. I still do this sometimes; even my lady catches me doing it now in the car. When I think of something, I have to try to visualize it. There were so many times I spent locked up without paper and I would think of the most beautiful styles, so I had to do what I had to do to capture it. It's just something you develop over time as an artist.

DID YOU EVER THINK THAT YOU WOULD MAKE ART YOUR CAREER?

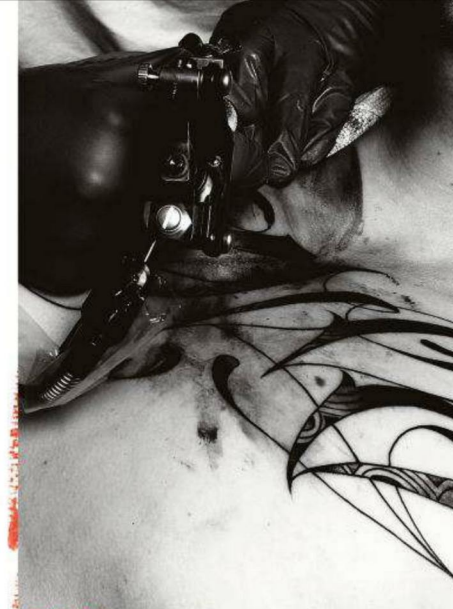
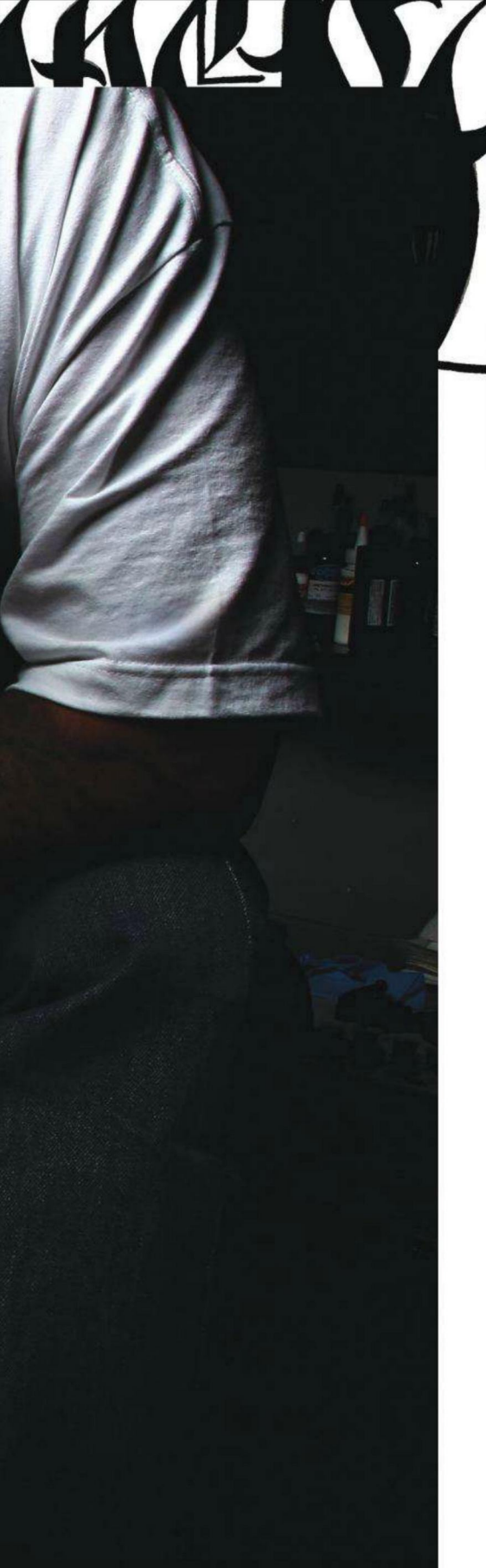
To tell you the truth, not at all. This is just my passion. I've never had much in life, but art is the one thing that I've always done. [Hip Hop Group] Psycho Realm is the first group that I ever did any artwork for.

HOW DID THAT OPPORTUNITY COME UP AND HOW DID IT CHANGE YOU?

In the late '90s, I was at my lowest. I was making all kinds of bad decisions and living life the wrong way. I had grown up with Sick Jacken and the group since the early '80s, so I had known them forever. They started doing well with their music and we were all proud of them, we looked up to them. I think Jack saw something in me because he used to let me work out of the group's office in downtown, and I'd still be doing bad shit but he was always telling me, "No, bro, you got something. You're gonna make it." He was the first to put a price on my work. He wanted me to do something for his group, and I was like, "Cool, no charge," because I wasn't charging my homies y'know? He was like "No, name your price, bro. Your stuff is worth money." I think I really needed to hear that. He had worked with artists before and said if I ever got asked to do something then I should charge. He paid me for a lot of artwork, and I'm forever grateful to him for reaching out to me like that.







"I'M PAINTING AND DRAWING EVERY DAY AND WORKING ON MY CRAFT. THIS IS ALL I'VE EVER DONE. IT GREW INTO TATTOOING. THAT WAS JUST SOMETHING THAT WAS A PART OF OUR CHICANO CULTURE. I NEVER GOT THE CHANCE TO DO AN APPRENTICESHIP OR ANYTHING; THIS IS JUST HOW I GREW UP."

YOU'VE ALSO BEEN ABLE TO COLLABORATE WITH OG ABEL AND SLICK, CORRECT?

Yes. Slick and I are in the same crew, K2S or "Kill 2 Succeed." I have been able to do some collaboration designs with his company, Dissizit, for some T-shirts, and I've always respected him. It's a blessing to work together. I met OG Abel at the MAGIC trade show, and we ended up talking for hours. We related to each other because of all the shit we've both been through, and we ended up collaborating just off of that one conversation. For him to ask me, I was overwhelmed and honored to work with him. He told me, "Don't charge for a piece by the time it takes you to create it because you're too good at what you do. Charge for all the years it took you to learn it—your whole fucking life. I wrote all over the walls, on the buses, I'd scribe my name on the

laundry carts, the schools, alleys, anything. I loved putting my name up. It took me my whole life to learn these styles, and I appreciate Abel's advice and friendship very much.

WHEN DID YOU START TAKING YOUR ART CAREER SERIOUSLY?

Those that know me know where I come from, and I don't regret my past because it made me who I am, but it's hard to believe that I am here to do what I'm doing. I've let down family and friends through the decisions and choices I made at certain times in my life, and I'm not proud of that. Losing my mother was a turning point to me. I caused her a lot of pain, and that still affects me to this day. I remember looking at a picture of her one day and just having an epiphany, like "What am I doing?" I thought it was too late for me, that I had ruined my life and didn't

have any chances left. I regret that I wasn't doing the stuff I am now while she was still around to see it. That hurts me.

DO YOU THINK SHE WOULD BE PROUD OF WHAT YOU'RE DOING NOW?

I hope so. I get a lot of support from my family and everyone, and that's part of what drives me. They tell me, "You're doing exactly what your mom would have wanted you to do." I feel like if I were to give up, I'd be giving up on what she taught me about being a good person and working hard. Money has nothing to do with me being an artist. Even though I gotta eat and shit, if I wasn't making money at it, art is what makes me happy. I've been doing this before I started making money with it, and my mom used to always back me. If I want to do shirts, she would be willing to pitch in, but I guess I

wasn't ready back then. I finally found my focus. I know that if I've influenced people in a negative way in my past, then I can do it in a positive way instead. I hope that my work will help to do that.

WHERE DID YOU END UP TATTOOING?

I was at Lowrider Tattoo for about a year, a really cool shop out there in Costa Mesa. I got to do my first traveling to conventions with them. The only bad thing is that it was too far for a commute. I've also worked out of Modern Ink and Will Rise Tattoo. Norm from Will Rise also does a lot of lettering, too, so working with him has always been cool.

YOU'VE ALSO BEEN ABLE TO TRAVEL TO CONVENTIONS. HOW HAS THAT EXPERIENCE CHANGED YOU?

I love traveling. It's only been a year and a half



Good from the Sere

that I've started traveling to conventions. I still get nervous for conventions. I was so nervous at the Pomona show, feeling like I didn't belong there with all those great artists. I felt confident but the minute the convention started I felt nervous. I've gotten more confident over the past few shows. Now that I've taken these trips I've learned how much I miss home when I travel. I have to appreciate stuff and not be in a hurry. Sometimes you just get to working and being busy and you can forget to appreciate the little things that are so precious. My plane might not make it home one day, and I wanna die knowing that I appreciated everything that I have. I

don't have a lot, but I'm not looking for riches, I just wanna be happy doing what I love to do.

WHAT MOTIVATED YOU TO CREATE YOUR BOOKS?

That was actually my wife's idea. She actually did the first mockup of my *Letters To Live By Vol. 1* by hand because she felt that might help my tattoo clients to pick out what styles of lettering they wanted from me. She has helped me a lot with getting my products and website out there, and we figured that my books would be great for people to use for reference, at least in terms of those people who were gonna tattoo the lettering. I don't

really consider it biting unless someone takes one of my designs and copies it. I know it is new for some people, so I respect that they will use it to learn, just like I did when I first saw the New York scene in *Style Wars*. Influence is influence, and you have to remember, some kids will get their first exposure to some of these styles through your efforts. A lot of these styles are becoming extinct, and I wanted to try to preserve what I knew in a collection. Getting to put a book together with Prime was a dream come true, he's probably influenced me more as an artist than anyone else. I'm humbled he wanted to work together.

IS IT TRUE YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD OFFERINGS BOOK IS IN THE GETTY MUSEUM?

Yeah, it's true, and the funny thing is that I didn't even know about the Getty. A friend of mine knows some people there, and he approached them about pitching an idea for a black book featuring all of these kinds of lettering in their archives because he knows it's a dying art. They borrowed the Neighborhood Offerings book, which was my third book, and the next day decided to put it in the archives. He told me, "Your book is at the Getty," and I'm like, "Cool, how many copies do they want—I thought it was a store!"

[laughs] He was like, "It's a research institute and your book is in there, do you know how big that is?!" It's crazy. The crew went down there to take pictures, but I was out of town, this just happened a few months ago. My books, *Letters To Live By Vols. 1 & 2* have been at the Museum of Contemporary Art for a while, too.

DO YOU THINK A NEWER ARTIST COULD PICK UP THE TRADITIONAL STREET STYLES?

Anyone can pick up lettering styles, and whether they are authentic or not, that's up to you; that's the beauty of it. You can give it your own twist and it will always be


authentic to you. Lettering is something that always evolves and it is constantly changing. The way I learned might not be the same way someone else learned, but that is what is cool. This art form will just keep progressing based on the work people choose to put into it.

WHERE DO YOU SEE YOUR ART IN THE FUTURE?

That's a hard question because I had no idea this would be what I'm doing for a living. I'm happy to be working with Slick, Abel, and Jack, and Prime. It's great to work with people you respect so much, and I never knew I could do that. I'm blessed to be in a position that something I



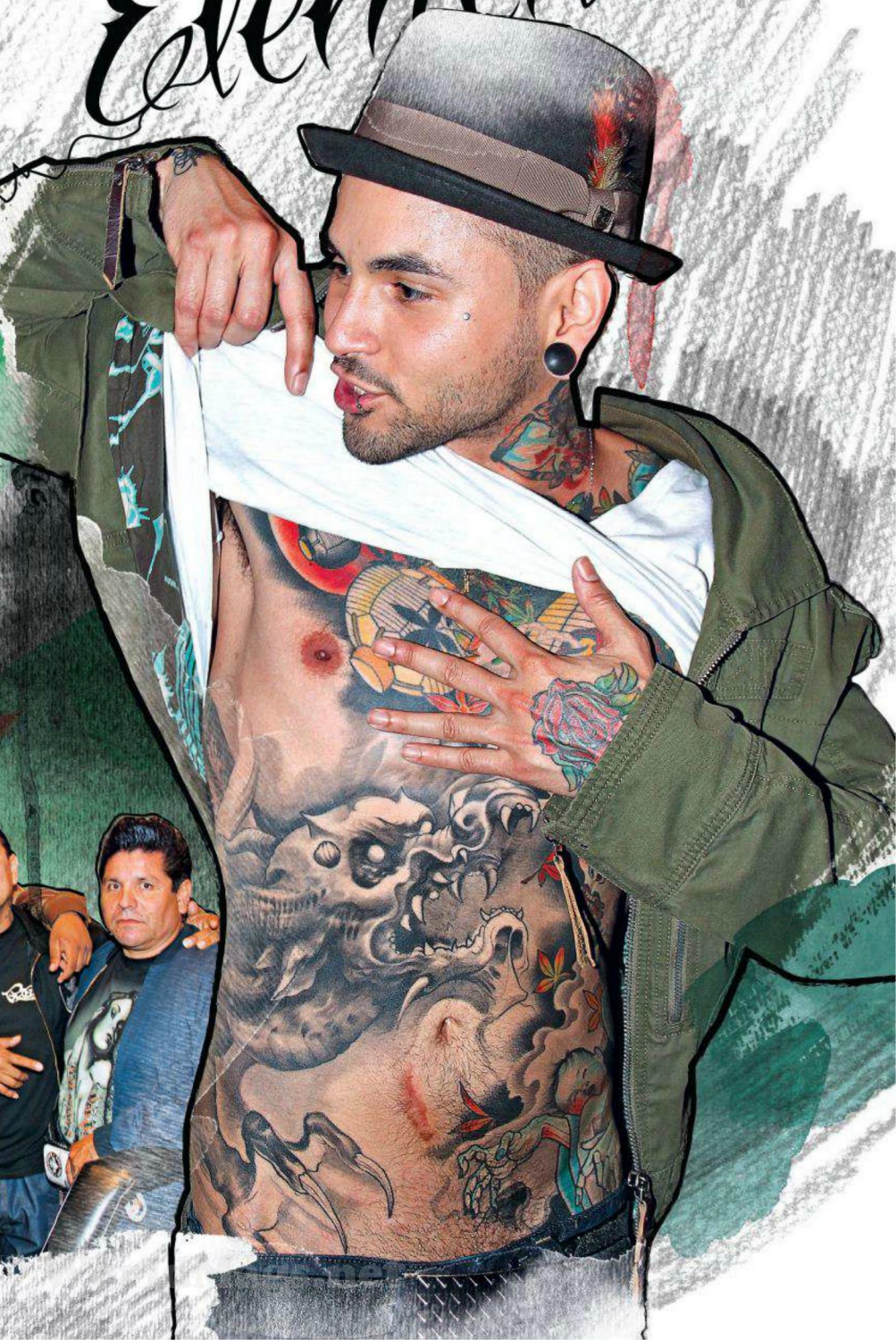
**"I CAN'T
IMAGINE
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IT SEEMS SO
DANGEROUS,
ALTHOUGH
I'M SURE THEY
WOULD SAY THE
SAME THING
ABOUT THE
CORNERS AND
WALLS I'VE
WRITTEN ON IN
MY LIFE, TOO."**

did that I didn't really think was significant is able to touch people in other parts of the world. It might just be lettering, but it's big to some people, and I'm grateful. No matter how far I travel, I still do free tattoos on the homies. I'll pick 'em up, drive them to the shop, even buy them lunch. I know some of them don't have money but want some work, and I will help them out because that is what I've always done. Money doesn't motivate my art; I feel like I have a long way to go. I can look at my stuff from last year and all I see is what I could've done better. I think that's a good attitude to have because you will always want to work harder to better your craft as an artist. 

Artistic Element

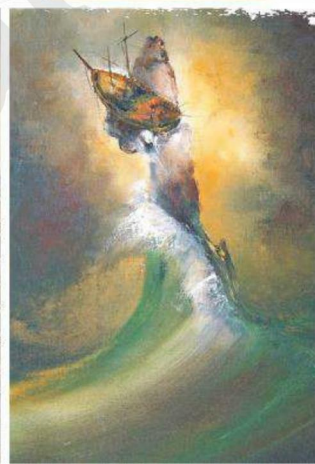
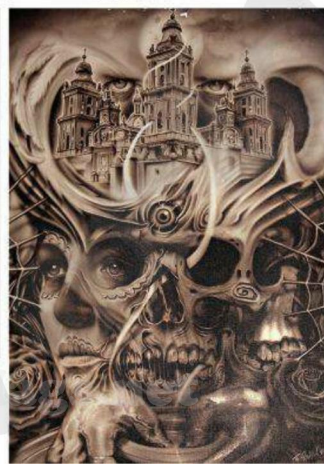
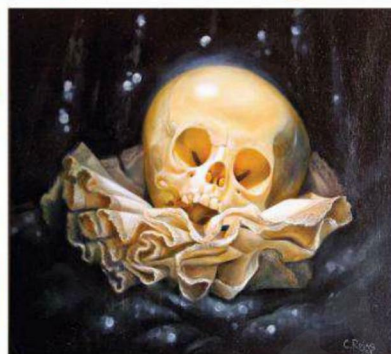
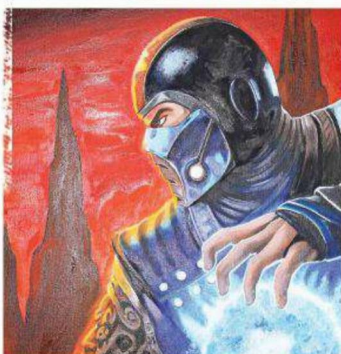
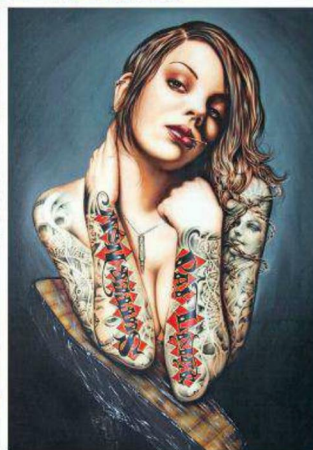
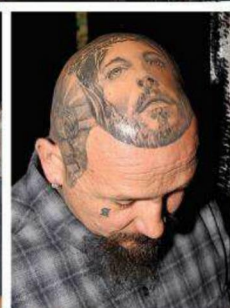
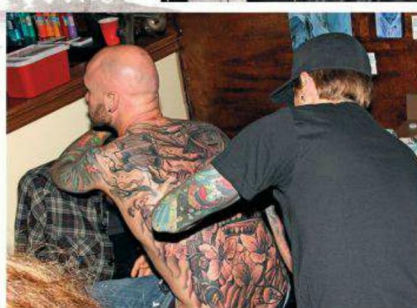
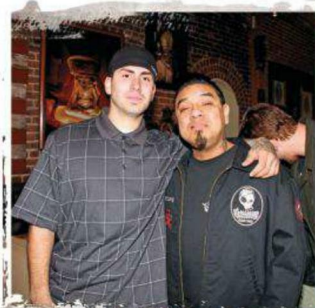
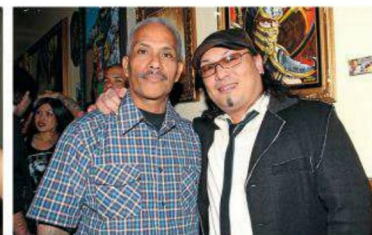
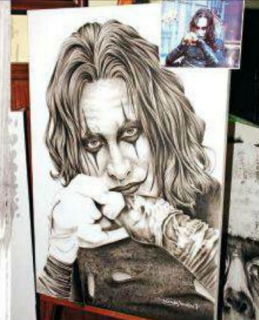
Location: Artistic Element Tattoo,
Los Angeles

Text: Richard Coyle, Photos: Beto Mendoza
web: ArtisticElementInk.com



Artistic Element Tattoo opened its second location on the very trendy and world-famous Melrose Avenue in Los Angeles, and BBI was personally invited by Roman Abrego to commemorate the grand opening of Artistic Element Tattoo II. Boy did we have a blast. The new location was impressive and looked more like an art gallery than a tattoo shop. We ran into a bunch of old friends and the usual

suspects such as Jess Yen, Fonzy, and Master Mike, to name a few. The grand opening was nothing short of spectacular and was blessed with talent from featured guest artists such as Roman himself, Mike DeVries, Mike Cole, Nikko Hurtado, and London. A live band paid tribute to some old-school music as well as playing some of their own, and an abundance of liquid concoctions were at the ready, never ceasing to flow. In short, pictures speak a thousand words, so enjoy!



Collaboratively Speaking:

20 Questions With
the Sullen Art Collective

Text: Mike Landers | Photos: Henry DeKuyper

Ryan "Sullen" Smith and Jeremy Hanna have learned firsthand that collaboration is the key to success. These two good friends came together to form a clothing label dedicated to the tattoo aesthetic, and they united themselves with a who's who of the world's foremost tattoo artists in the process.





"MONEY IS WORTH NOTHING COMPARED TO RELATIONSHIPS. IF I'M GOING TO LOSE A RELATIONSHIP OVER MONEY, I'D RATHER JUST GIVE YOU THE MONEY. I THINK THAT'S WHY PEOPLE LIKE US SO MUCH, BECAUSE WHEN WE ARE TESTED, WE PROVE THAT. WE AREN'T GREEDY PEOPLE."

- RYAN "SULLEN" SMITH

Making your mark as a clothing company is not easy these days. In a fashion world of cookie cutter designs and oversaturated themes, originality remains supreme, and nobody understands that better than Ryan "Sullen" Smith and Jeremy Hanna, founders of the art-driven label Sullen Art Collective. In just a few short years, this collaborative brand has gone worldwide,

amassing 45 countries in its distribution network and spreading original pieces and designs by some of the tattoo community's most revered artists in the process. "Being art driven, everyone knows we're not trying to be a skate company or a snowboard company. We are an art company, and any collaborative efforts have to follow along those lines," says Jeremy from his desk at the company's Los Alamitos, California, hub. Jeremy's reverence for the culture

that has sparked Sullen's success is genuine, as is cofounder Ryan Smith's, whose tattoo artist background and Art Center of Pasadena education laid the foundation for the two to create one of the most interesting and tattoo-centric labels from the ground up. The company has collaborated with dozens of the culture's best and brightest artists and also with companies like Jet Pilot, Grenade, and Metal Mulisha, while sponsoring action sports athletes in wakeboarding,

skateboarding, BMX, MMA, FMX, supercross, and snowboarding. The company also supports a variety of musical artists from hip hop to punk, and Sullen has recently raised thousands of dollars for cancer research through a charity T-shirt designed by Ryan himself. It is this sense of giving back and unity that has really added the fuel to Sullen's creative fire, and their work within the tattoo community has not gone unnoticed. "I had an artist tell me once, 'You don't



Collaborating

understand what you guys are doing for the tattoo community. A few years ago, some of these local tattoo shops were rivals against each other and didn't necessarily get along. You guys have helped bring all these artists together. Look at all these different artists and shops that are partying together. That didn't happen five years ago. Now you have this big team of artists that met each other through Sullen and look out for one another.' That made

me feel really good about what we're doing, and we're dedicated to helping that continue," Jeremy says. Given the brand's grassroots foundation and skyrocketing success, it is clear that Sullen will carry the torch as an ambassador for the tattoo culture for a long time to come. We paid a visit to the company's 13,000-square-foot complex in Los Alamitos to learn more about the company's foundation, vision for the future, and why working together is

the only way to succeed.

HOW DID YOU GUYS COME TOGETHER AND DECIDE TO LAUNCH SULLEN?

RYAN: We've always been close friends, and being rooted in SoCal, you're surrounded by action sports and action sports apparel, so the idea of being in that industry was very appealing to us. We had several conversations about it, but talking about it and doing it are two different things, and we eventually found a partner

to help us out financially. And while that got us in the door, it also held us back. That partner was much more money motivated than creatively motivated, which is fine, because you have to make a profit, but we weren't a cohesive unit until he left, and that's when the brand really flourished. We weren't really Sullen until after that happened. His goals and directions were different than ours and he was very controlling. Jeremy and I have a shared vision, so when

that partner left, the brand really was born and that was about six years ago. If you put something out that's good, the money will come. It's a patient process. JEREMY: We started in Huntington Beach because we thought that was a smart way to go because there were other companies there and we figured that looked good on our catalog [laughs]. That's why even though we grew up in Garden Grove, we became known as a Huntington Beach

company. We started this business with 25K and we were selling T-shirts off the couch to our friends. Our main marketing campaign was stickers; we'd get dressed up in all black clothes and sticker the freeway exits. Starting off with the guerilla-marketing concept forced us to get creative with survival on the business side of things.

WHAT WAS THE ARTISTIC DIRECTION BEHIND SULLEN WHEN YOU GUYS FIRST STARTED? HAS THAT CHANGED?

RYAN: When we created the brand, we were in tune with the action sports/lifestyle scene of SoCal, so the initial aesthetic of the brand reflected that with logo-driven/icon-driven designs that fit with those times. As the brand matured, we started incorporating more hand-drawn artwork into the line to give us a different look than what was out there. One late night, Jeremy and I were up working on some styles to finish a look book for a trade show, and we used a tattoo design that I had done for somebody, and Jeremy said "How cool would that look on a T-shirt?" It ended up being one of the first designs that was taken by a major retailer. That honed us in on the art being the brand's focus, and that was only furthered at a tattoo convention we visited. The tattoo aesthetic, tattoo collectors, and artists have become our core audience, and we're happy with how the brand has evolved since its inception.

WERE YOU GUYS MET WITH SKEPTICISM REGARDING THE ARTISTIC CHANGE IN THE DIRECTION OF YOUR BRAND FROM ACTION SPORTS TO TATTOOING?

JEREMY: Not really. Even though we were pushing more action sports when we started, even though it was more logo driven, it still had that tattoo look to it thanks to Ryan. He's always been a lettering guy. A lot of people knew Ryan was a tattoo artist, too, and he was tattooing for a living back then while I was bartending. I'd go knock on doors and get them slammed in my face Monday through Thursday for Sullen, and I'd bartend the other three nights and be back to work again on Monday. For a time I was our only sales rep, so we did what we had to do. On the flip side, Ryan was finishing up his last semester at the Art



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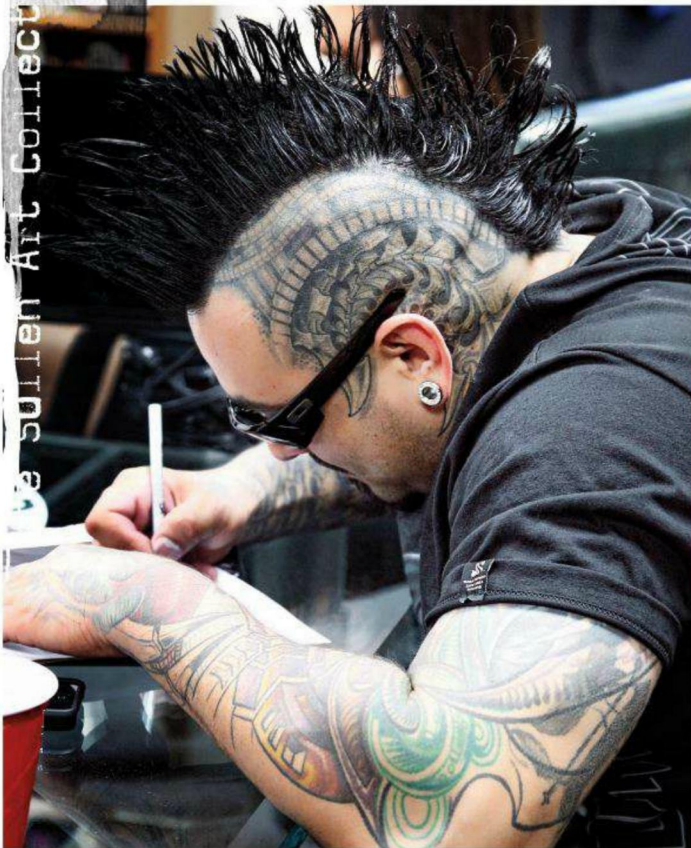
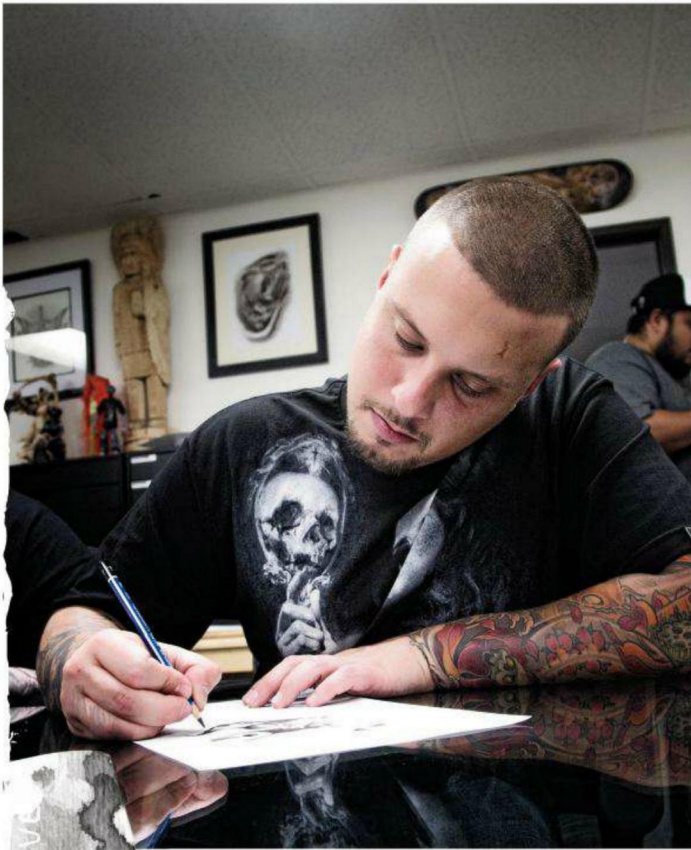
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"BEING ART DRIVEN, EVERYONE KNOWS WE'RE NOT TRYING TO BE A SKATE COMPANY OR A SNOWBOARD COMPANY, WE ARE AN ART COMPANY, AND ANY COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS HAVE TO FOLLOW ALONG THOSE LINES."

- JEREMY HANNA

Center of Pasadena. He actually got a part-time job at a screen printer, and they would design shirts and print them for people. He was technically designing for other brands that would go through the screen printer while we were starting Sullen. He speaks "print," and he can make decisions and communicate with our printers and that helps out.

RYAN, WHEN DID YOU START TATTOOING? DID THE PURSUIT OF HIGHER EDUCATION AT THE ART CENTER OF PASADENA HELP PREPARE YOU TO BUILD THE BRAND IN ANYWAY?

RYAN: I started my tattoo apprenticeship when I was 19 in 1996 at a shop called Club Tattoo. I ended up finishing my apprenticeship and working professionally for about three years. I had a back injury when I was 16, so as I was progressing professionally, I realized that I needed something to fall back on because my back wouldn't allow me to commit the amount of time that a professional tattooist would have to commit to make a professional living. I made it a point to further my art education, and I got accepted into the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena where I started focusing on the commercial side of art and the process of making things presentable and working on deadlines. That education really prepped me for the business side of art. It also honed in all of my technical skills because I got to use Photoshop

and Adobe Illustrator, so I learned all of the software that goes along with a clothing company. In the beginning, I had to do all of that stuff myself for Sullen. We couldn't outsource any of that stuff, so I was forced to learn it because we needed it for the brand.

WHAT ARE YOUR INFLUENCES AS A TATTOO ARTIST?

RYAN: As far as what I like to do, I like to draw all my tattoos from scratch; I don't use reference artwork. The good thing about working for Sullen is that I really get to cherry-pick the tattoos I do because I do tattoos for fun and more for my friends than I do for money. Black and gray is my thing. I'm a West Coast guy.

DO YOU EVER TATTOO ON YOURSELF?

RYAN: I haven't tattooed myself, other than being bored and giving myself tattoos I regret [laughs]. I am honored to have work by some amazing artists like Carlos Torres, Nikko Hurtado, Bob Tyrell, Jay Langer, and others, and I can't wait to get more.

YOU GUYS HAVE A REVERENCE FOR TATTOO ART AND THE ARTISTS BEHIND THEM. WHO IS CURRENTLY FEATURED IN YOUR ON-SITE GALLERY?

JEREMY: In addition to the tattoos, we are lucky enough to have our walls at Sullen covered. Right now you can find original



collaboratively

pieces by Carols Torres, Ryan, Jack Rudy, Norm from Will Rise, Bob Tyrell, Mickey Morgan, Shawn Barber, Simon Hayag, Alan Padilla, Andy Engle, Corey Norris, and Ben

Miller. We also have the first collaborative piece that Ryan and Big Gus ever did, which launched our first Fallen Angel shirt. That shirt really took off for us, and a lot of

companies bit off of the design, copy and pasting it into several designs. We also have a Kevin Llewellyn print here.

RYAN, WERE YOU THE

PRINCIPAL DESIGNER AND WHO DID YOU COLLABORATE WITH FIRST?

RYAN: In the beginning, out of necessity, I was the sole designer. We

had no extra money to pay anyone and didn't have the forethought to work collaboratively because we really didn't have anything to offer in exchange. From the

very beginning when we started making the brand more of an art-driven thing, I've always loved the idea of the collaborative process. I learned that early on from

Mr. Flaks

Big Sleeps

Ivano Natale



John Caleb

Sick Jacken

"WE TRY TO COMMUNICATE EVERYTHING AS BEST AS POSSIBLE, BOTH TO THE ARTISTS AND THE COMMUNITY, BECAUSE IT'S SO CRUCIAL TO OUR SUCCESS AND THE SUCCESS OF OUR ARTISTS. I PRIDE MYSELF ON BEING AVAILABLE TO ALL OUR GUYS; THEY ALL THINK I GET PAID JUST TO BE ON THE PHONE BECAUSE I'M ALWAYS ON IT."

- JEREMY HANNA

Johnny Cisneros

Rick Walters

Jeremy Hanna



Tyler Bredeweg

Carlos Torres

"PROTECTING OTHER ARTISTS' DESIGNS IS A BIG PART OF WHAT I DO. ALTERING THEM TO FIT A T-SHIRT JUST MEANS MAXIMIZING THE DESIGNS TO FIT THE MEDIUM, AND I SPEND HOURS MAKING SURE THAT OTHER ARTISTS' DESIGNS COME OUT LOOKING THE BEST THEY CAN. THEY ALSO GET TO APPROVE EVERYTHING 100 PERCENT BEFORE WE MANUFACTURE THEM."

- RYAN "SULLEN" SMITH



Ryan Smith &
Terrah Smith



Gustavo Rimada

Jack Rudy



Roman Abrego

Guy Atchison and Paul Booth when they kind of pioneered art fusion and tattoo conventions, and the idea of collaboration was really appealing to me. It started off with

us working with Tom Berg through one of our investors, and he ended up submitting art to us, and as we grew, the possibility of collaborative work became more and

more real, so we started reaching out to people. The idea of sharing art and not making it about yourself is what I wanted the brand to be defined by, and it took

many, many years for that message to be what we were known for. It's something we've been working on for the last four or five years. JEREMY: It's been fun.

Some of the first few guys Ryan started working with are still some of his favorites to work with. Guys like Tom Berg and Carlos Torres were there in the beginning, and

I remember watching all three start drawing together because their chemistry was so apparent. Around that time, Ryan was trying to get a tattoo from Nikko

Freddy Negrete &
Isaiah Negrete

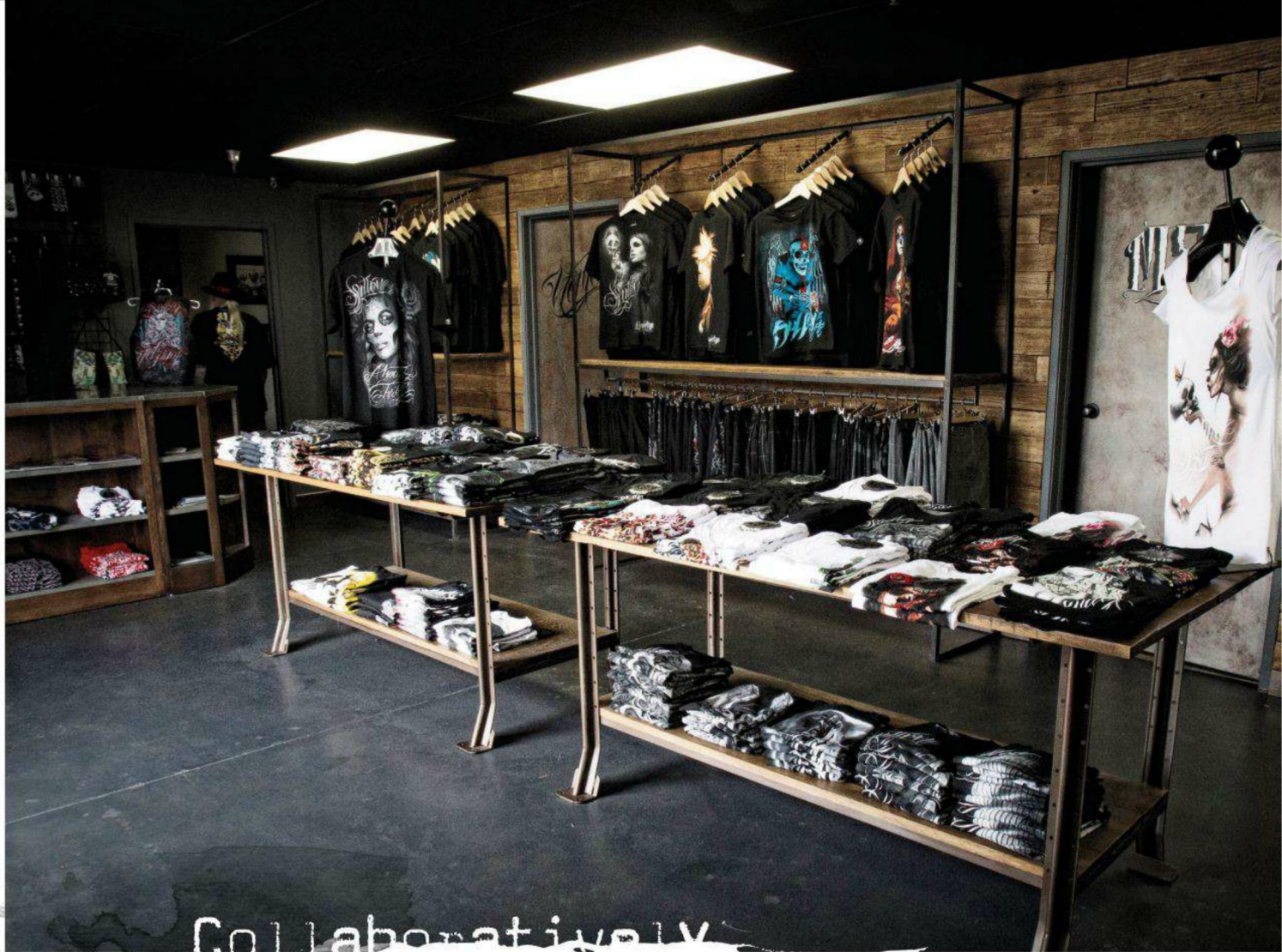
Alexis Vaatete



Steve Soto

Jacob Doney

Big Gus



Collaboratively

Hurtado, and they began talking because Nikko wanted help in putting out some shirts. He agreed to do a run of Sullen shirts, and that shirt is still in our line and is our longest-standing shirt.

WHAT TYPES OF COLLABORATIONS HAVE YOU DONE WITH OTHER COMPANIES?

JEREMY: Since we're an art-driven brand, we get to collab with other companies in different genres. We worked with Grenade Snowboard company to create snowboard jackets, gloves, hoodies, and a girl's tee. We also made a wakeboard vest with Jet

Pilot, and have recently been working with Metal Mulisha. We've done a few T-shirts with the guys from Cypress Hill, and B-Real always shows us love on stage and in his B-Real TV series on the Internet. Our Sullen BMX Team is hard at work on the Mountain Dew Tour, and we support them, along with Randall "the Vandal" Harris, who is an amazing wakeboarder. We also sponsor Rick Thorn, who has been promoting his music a lot lately, even though most people know him as a BMX guy. We have a skateboarder, Austin Seaholm, who just took a gold medal over in Estonia, as well as two local MMA fighters.

We're also working on a compilation CD with music from guys like Cypress Hill, Psycho Realm, Crazytown, Andy Vargas of Santana, and a host of others. We've got a pretty big family and we're happy to support who we can.

WHEN IT COMES TO COLLABORATING WITH OTHER ARTISTS, HOW DO YOU APPROACH ALTERING THEIR WORK TO FIT A T-SHIRT? DO YOU GUYS FEEL ANY PRESSURE IN THIS PROCESS?

RYAN: As an artist, I approach other artists' T-shirts like they were my own; I think about what if it was my T-shirt, how would I want that

represented? We really take a lot of time and energy to figure out what's the best way for each piece to be translated. Whether it's to grayscale it, limit the colors down, or scale the image bigger or smaller, we do whatever it takes to get it right. To us, we live and die by our artists, and if they're not happy, we don't have a brand. I spend hours and sometimes days on each T-shirt to prep the artwork to optimize it for our T-shirts, but at the end of the day, we always make sure the art is approved. We don't ever put anything into production without the artist getting 100 percent sign-off, so that way we know what we provide

for them is exactly what they want. Not only that, we take it a step further and when the artwork is translated, we make sure it works by overseeing the physical act of printing. Everything we print is done domestically so I can keep a close eye on it and make sure that if anything was to go wrong, I can take full accountability for it. **JEREMY:** A lot of our collaborative efforts have come organically. We'll meet and be talking with guys at trade shows and things will move forward. It's been good, but at the same time, there have been artists out there wondering why we haven't asked them to work yet. Some of them

are really great artists that we really respect and would love to work with, but we just haven't had that introduction yet. If the artists aren't happy, word gets out quick and we want to make sure that they are happy.

WHY DO YOU GUYS THINK SO MANY ARTISTS HAVE BEEN WILLING TO WORK WITH YOU? WHAT IS IT ABOUT SULLEN THAT MOTIVATES THE COLLABORATIVE PROCESS?

JEREMY: We've had a few key things on our side. First of all, because Ryan was a tattoo artist and graduated from Art Center with honors, he's helped other artists with things



they need help with, so we've been able to call them for help with things, too, and that has helped to foster relationships a lot. We've always had an art-driven foundation; it's a great community that we've gotten to work with. We also understand that these artists are protective over what they do, and our respect for the culture has allowed us to all help each other and cross promote. We aren't some white-collar guys capitalizing off of the tattoo industry, and these artists understand that. We have a real community here and we're a big family.

RYAN: I've always been a detail-oriented guy, which I think has been a big



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"WE'VE HAD ROSS, TJ MAXX, AND MARSHALL'S BANGING ON OUR DOOR FOR FIVE YEARS...BUT WE PREFER TO KEEP OUR DESIGNS MORE LIMITED BECAUSE TO US THEY ARE ART, NOT PRODUCT."

- JEREMY HANNA

strength to not only our designs and quality, but our business relationships as well. The artists know that I am meticulous about presenting their designs the best way possible, and my experience in tattooing, drawing, and computer software, has helped me to translate everything effectively.

WHEN AN ARTIST COLLABORATES WITH YOU ON A T-SHIRT, HOW DOES THAT WORK?

JEREMY: We started producing the shirts as if they were limited-edition prints. We get calls from people wanting shirts, but we only print them once and then never again, with the exception of three shirts. It's pretty much one design per season, and then they're done, which frustrates some of the artists sometimes, but we treat the tees like art, and when they're gone, they're gone. It makes for a better demand anyway.

WHAT MAKES FOR A GOOD DESIGN?

RYAN: It's not so much the composition as it is the story within the art that makes for a great piece. I look for a story. I look for something that people can relate to. I think the most popular designs that we've had are narratives and stories that people see themselves feeding into. Be it lost love, addiction, lust, or whatever; I always look for a balance of opposites that juxtapose one another.

YOU GUYS HAVE BECOME A WORLDWIDE PHENOMENON. WHAT COUNTRIES HAVE BEEN SOME OF YOUR BIGGER MARKETS?

JEREMY: I don't know the exact science behind it, but in the beginning, Poland was a big market. Some of the Eastern European countries are big for us, Australia is really behind us, South Africa, South America, and Canada are also great markets for us. One of the interesting things that we stumbled upon is that in doing the shirts for the artists, they'll take them to the conventions and sometimes have them in their booths, so we have all these world-renowned artists with their Sullen shirts in their booth, and it's become great marketing. That's really helped us gain worldwide acceptance.

WHAT DO YOU GUYS HAVE IN STORE FOR THE FUTURE?

RYAN: We will definitely be doing more collaborations; I want to see all the artists become more successful from the efforts that we push for them. To me, my ultimate goal is that we all rise together. The more we can do for the guys we work with, the happier that I am. I always feel like giving back.

JEREMY: Creatively, I'd like to get more international artists, more East Coast artists, and continue to make Sullen a worldwide effort. The more profile we have, the more money we can raise for the things and people we believe in. 

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Chest Plate

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* ukrainian

The chest plate has some of the most real estate to get a tattoo done. And while some consider it a hidden power, others deem it the most essential and powerful since it is so centrally located to the heart.

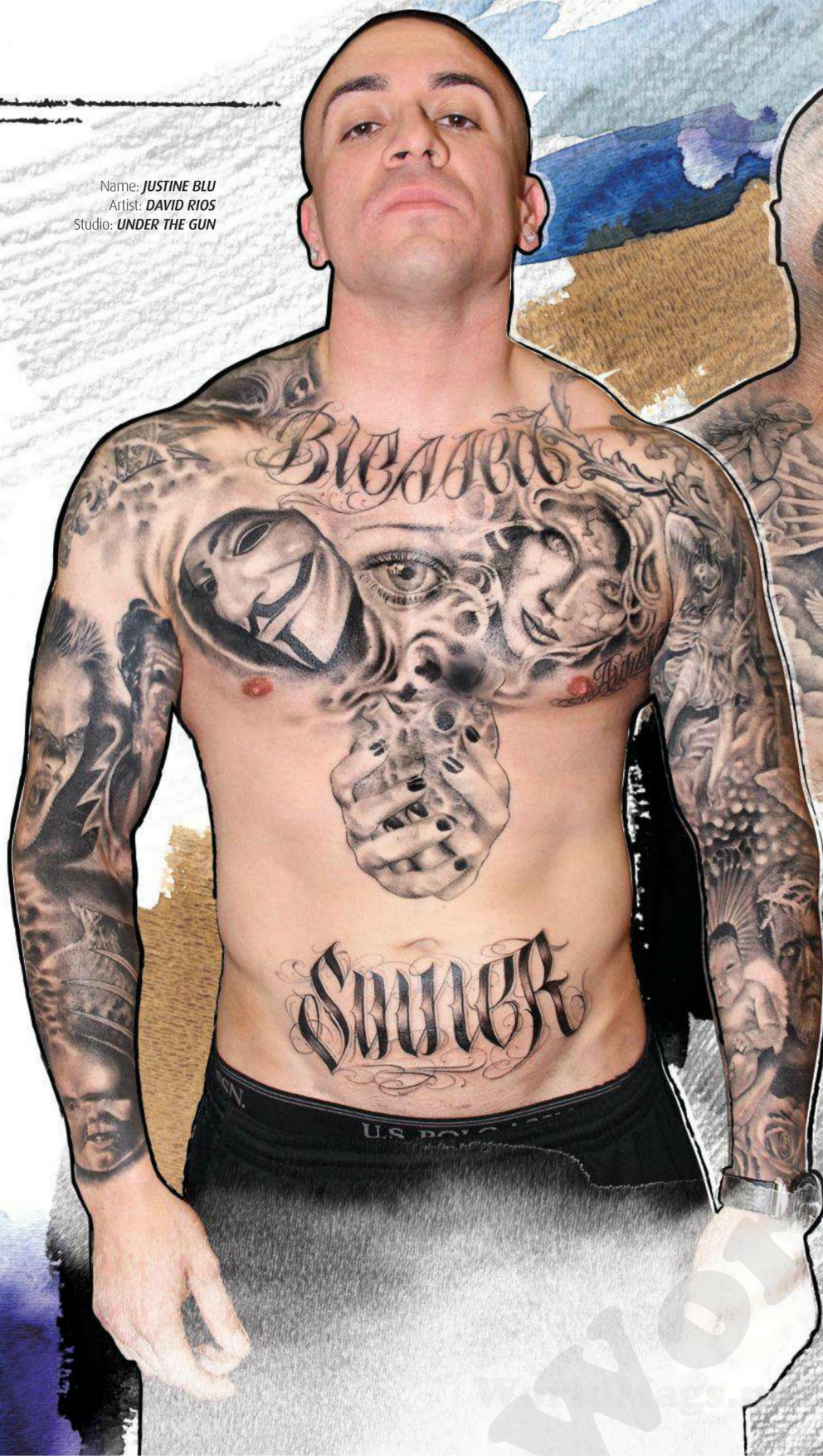
Name: **MIKEY BLANES**

Artist: **SPIDER**

Studio: **MI FAMILIA**



Name: **JUSTINE BLU**
Artist: **DAVID RIOS**
Studio: **UNDER THE GUN**



Name: **CRUZ**
Artist: **SPIDER**
Studio: **MI FAMILIA**



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Jugular

*Il collo è un perfetto ponte fra quello che tu senti e che tu dici. E' una delle più delicate zone da realizzare un tatuaggio ma un giorno è fatto, può essere considerato la tua seconda voce.**

* italian

It's the segue between what's felt and what's said, and when it comes to tattoos it has been considered one of the most painful areas to get done. It's the only tattoo considered to be one's secondary voice of expression.

Name: **ALEX STRANGLER**
Artist: **TIM BECK**
Studio: **FREEDOM INK**

Name: CLARK MILLER
Artist: AL GARCIA
Studio: ALLIGATOR INK



Backhanded

Por definición, lo contrario de las palmeras o un insulto disfrazado como un cumplido. En el caso de *Bound by Ink* esta sección se define por el magnífico arte impreso permanentemente en la carne de la mano de uno.*



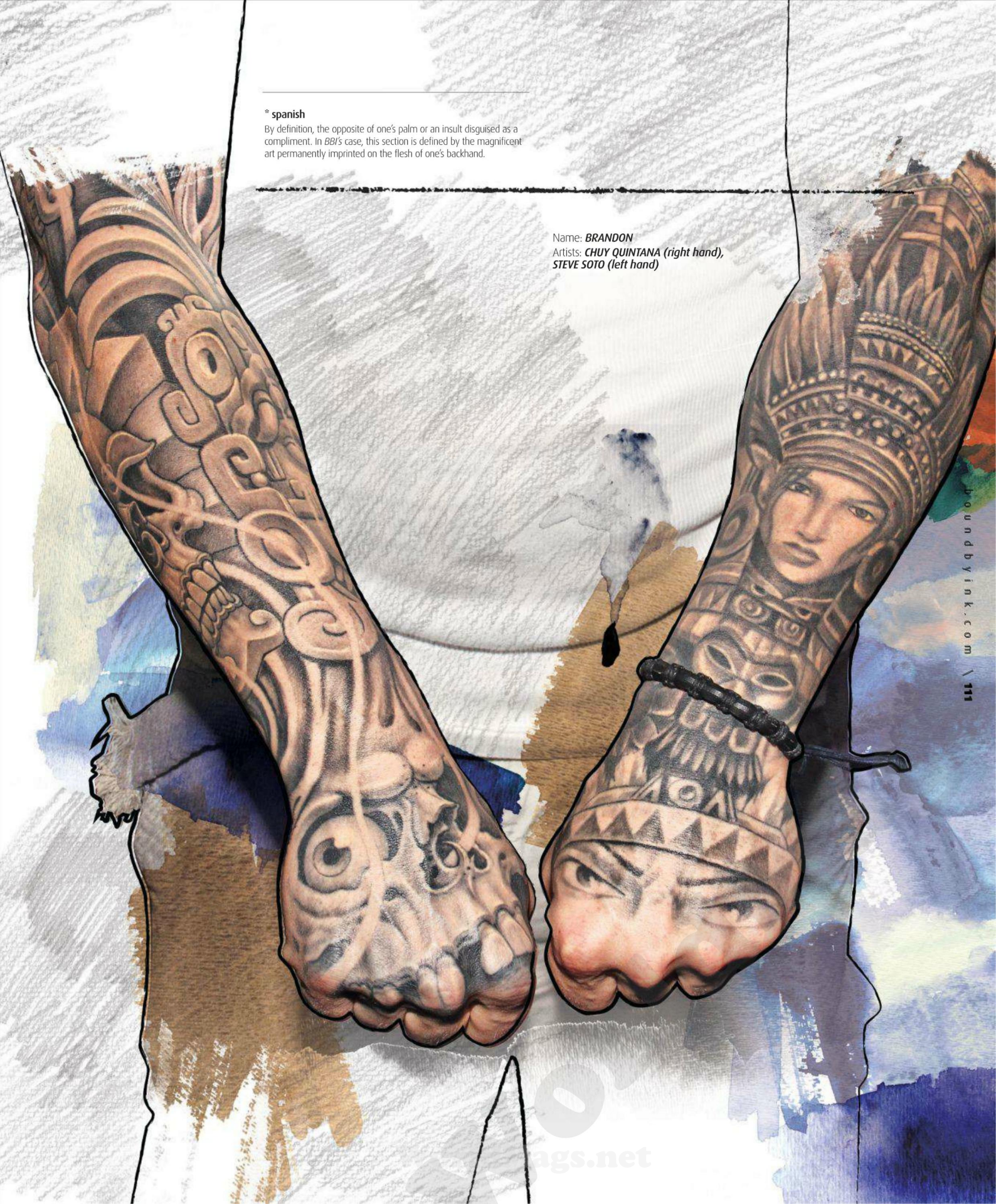
Name: CLARK MILLER
Artist: AL GARCIA
Studio: ALLIGATOR INK

* **spanish**

By definition, the opposite of one's palm or an insult disguised as a compliment. In *BBJ's* case, this section is defined by the magnificent art permanently imprinted on the flesh of one's backhand.

Name: **BRANDON**

Artists: **CHUY QUINTANA** (right hand),
STEVE SOTO (left hand)



no me shot

Голова и лицо всегда будут неприкосновенны и оберегаемы но * если разговор займет
о "четких паучках" то они еще раз докажут, что это самая часть тела
как ни одна другая создана для татуировок.*

* russian

The head and face are oftentimes considered untouchable and sacred, but when it comes to these bold individuals they've deemed it the perfect canvas to show that they're headstrong and dedicated to the art.

Name: **RICHIE**
Artist: **PLACASO**



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Будут неприкосновенны и оберегаемы но * если разговор займет
"то они еще раз докажут, что это самая часть тела
создана для татуировок.*

Name: JASON PROFANT
Artist: GRANT COBB
Studio: SPOTLIGHT



Name: MARK CHAVEZ
Artist: CARLOS MACIAS
Studio: CRYPTIC TATTOO





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